

S E R M O N S

PREACHED IN THE

ABBET CHURCH AT BATH,

BY A LATE

DIGNIFIED CLERGYMAN.

V O L. II.

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S E R M O N XVI.

I. JOHN, iv. 1.

*Beloved, believe not every Spirit; but try
the Spirits, whether they are of God.*

IT hath pleased the Almighty Creator to impress upon the heart of man a moral sense of good and evil, right and wrong; by virtue of which distinguishing faculty he is enabled and required both to form his own conduct, and to prove that of others. The propriety of all free action, whoever be the agent, even matters of divine administration, are subject to the cognizance of human

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reason,

reason, within the assigned sphere of it's comprehension : As is evident from the frequent appeals which God himself hath vouchsafed to make to it. Thus we find him excusing the severity of his judgments upon his chosen People, by the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah —“And now, O Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my Vineyard : What could have been done more to my Vineyard, that I have not done in it ?”— In like manner does he call upon the Israelites, by his Servant Ezekiel, to acknowledge the equity of his dispensations —“Hear now, O House of Israel, are not my ways equal, are not your ways unequal ?”— Our Blessed Lord too, during his abode upon earth, oftentimes expostulated with the Jews upon the unreasonableness of their infidelity, in not making a proper use of those intellectual abilities with which God had endued

endued them, toward discovering the evidences of his mission, and the truth of his doctrines—"Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth; but how is it that ye cannot discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."—Accordingly the Inhabitants of Beræa are highly commended by the sacred Historian, for a more ingenuous disposition than some other Jews, in that they diligently compared the Apostle's preaching with the tenor of their Scriptures.—St. Paul too enjoins Christians in general to "prove all things," in order to the rejecting what is evil, and to the "holding fast that which is good."—And upon the same principle of rational and impartial enquiry is grounded the admonition of St. John in my text—"Beloved, believe not

every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God."

It is then plainly agreeable to the divine will, that men should apply the light of their reason to distinguish truth from falshood, as in all cases, so especially where Religion is concerned. — Since it must be owned and lamented that impositions upon the understandings of mankind in spiritual matters, are become almost as common as in the ordinary transactions of human life; and how infinitely more fatal I need not say.

Let me observe further that this salutary caution is addressed by the Apostle to all degrees of Christians; as having a common right to a judgment of discretion in all things necessary to their salvation. The actual possession of which judgment or ability of discerning, it is therefore every one's duty to endeavour
after

after to the utmost of their powers, with an ingenuous application ; and to exercise upon all fitting occasions with integrity and candour. This, I say, is required of all persons whatever, whether they be of the Clergy or Laity, whether they be Dispensers or Hearers of God's Word. — But seeing the mental qualifications of mankind toward ascertaining a regular system of faith and worship cannot but be extremely various and unequal ; so that those of meaner and less improved capacities must in many cases have recourse to others of superior endowments ; when at the same time the determinations of the best and wisest are by no means infallible ; it shall therefore be the subject of my present discourse,

First—To enquire what is here meant by the Spirits, which we are admonished to try before we trust—whence will appear the Expediency of so doing—And,

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Secondly—To offer some Considerations respecting the proper Rule, whereby they are to be tried, and the most effectual Means of applying it.

1. First then—By spirits in the text we are to understand in general the religious principles and doctrines of men : A due examination of which may lead us to discover, by what kind of spirit they are actuated, whether good or evil, who severally maintain and promote them. For though the recesses of the human heart be confessedly dark and deceitful, yet the stream of a man's opinions, when made publick, is to every taste the surest criterion of the bitter or sweet qualities of that hidden fountain from whence they issue.

But in order to a distinct apprehension both of the particular occasion, and general use, of the monitory precept now before

before us, it will be proper to recollect, that, in the early days of Christianity, God was pleased to endow the primitive Teachers and Propagators of it with many extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost; by virtue of whose immediate inspiration they were enabled to preach the gospel in every language under Heaven, without any previous instruction; and were also invested with a power of working miracles, thereby to enforce their doctrine with signs following. Nor were these signal endowments limited to their own persons; but were in fit proportion, according to the will of God, and the exigencies of his Church, communicated to others also whom they converted; and continued so to be, till the Religion of Christ being competently established, these miraculous interpositions ceased, together with the necessity of them.—Now, both the doctrines and precepts delivered by those heavenly

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Messengers were in their own nature so excellent, and so important to the happiness of the world, as well as ratified by such a cloud of infallible testimony ; that the more strictly they were enquired into, the more evidently they must be seen to have come from God : And it seems indeed strange there should have been any at that period, who could wilfully refuse either their attention or assent to them. Notwithstanding, we are informed from sacred record, that the great Adversary of Mankind (ever busy to obstruct the progress of so holy an institution, manifestly subversive of his usurped dominion, and to counteract the designs of a good Providence) raised up many evil Spirits, diverse kinds of Antichrists, even in the days of the Apostles : Some, false Prophets and false Teachers, pretenders to inspiration and pretenders to miracles, thereby privily introducing pernicious heresies : Whilst
some

some most unscripturally contended for justification by works only, others very absurdly maintained the sufficiency of faith, to the utter exclusion of the best works; "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Of which latter sort they are particularly described, as "creeping into houses, taking captive silly women laden with sins, led away with diverse lusts."—Some again appear to have been downright Levellers, despising government, and "speaking evil of dignities."—Some, Skepticks, unlearned and unstable, perverting Scripture to their own destruction.—Some, Scoffers at the mysteries of Revelation, calumniating those things which they understood not.—So great reason had St. John to caution and admonish his Jewish Converts as in the text, "Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God."

But

But if such malignant Spirits made their appearance so very early in the Christian Church, and molested it in it's infant state; when the purity and simplicity of it's doctrines were obvious to every impartial enquirer; no wonder if they continue to disturb and divide it with additional numbers, and upon more advantageous grounds; since they themselves reduced it to the unhappy necessity of explaining it's original principles by more diffusive Creeds, and defensive Articles; which could hardly be so ordered, as not to leave room for misconstruction and cavil to ill-disposed minds. And such we know is the singular effrontery of these cavillers, that they are never ashamed to advance the same stale objections, though repeatedly and unanswerably refuted.—There are moreover in these our days, as in those of old, many blind and corrupt Leaders, Enthusiasts, Infidels, Impostors; all lending a hand,
jointly

jointly and separately, to undermine the faith once delivered to the Saints; and to throw down the ancient fences of regular edification, decency and discipline in the Church. — Surely then we too are no less concerned in this friendly admonition to “Try the Spirits,” than those primitive Converts to whom it was first given. An indolent disregard to which, in the present circumstances of things, can scarce fail of betraying men into one or other of these unhappy consequences; either that of resting their salvation upon the dictates of mere human authority; or of taking a miserable refuge in a skeptical indifference toward all modes of Faith and Religion whatsoever.

Ignorantly and indiscriminately to reject every spiritual Guide and Interpreter who may offer to shew us the way of God more perfectly, were indeed unbecoming us either as Men or Christians; would

would also prove a certain discouragement to their pious endeavours, who labour in treading out the corn of divine knowledge; and might therefore in many instances preclude the favours of an indulgent Providence. But to weigh well the integrity of such a one's principles, the uprightness of his intentions, and the truth of his doctrines, before we resign up our assent to them, is both the natural privilege and indispensable duty of every person, in proportion to the means which God hath afforded him.— What these are, and how to be applied with good effect I proceed in the next place to consider.

2. It is a character given us of our Blessed Saviour, that “He needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.” By virtue of his divine omniscience he was thoroughly acquainted with the thoughts and intentions

intentions of the human heart; of which he gave abundant proof throughout the whole course of his ministry. And so requisite was this intuitive discernment in some cases to the first Planters of his Religion, that we find a power of discerning the Spirits of others, to have been imparted to the Apostles amongst the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost. Thus was St. Peter enabled to discover the hypocritical pretences of Ananias and Saphira; with a view to deter others from incurring the like guilt, through any vain hopes of being concealed.

But this spiritual endowment, with the rest of a like supernatural kind, being long since withdrawn, we are now left to the ordinary means of Reason and Scripture, for our protection against the wiles and impositions of designing men. And these it greatly behoves us
upon

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upon all occasions to exert and apply in the best manner we are able.

The first and leading principle in all religious enquiries is certainly Reason ; that universal light “ which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” By this rule not only the opinions of fallible men, but the credibility and evidences of the Scriptures themselves are to be tried ; which were not given to invalidate our Reason, but to aid and further it : And whoever presume to set these at variance with each other, are in reality enemies to both : It being inconceivable that the all-wise Lawgiver should require any thing of his intelligent subjects, as essential to their happiness, that upon thorough examination is contradictory to that common sense, and those moral notices, which He originally implanted in their nature.

There

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There is however a point of great caution to be attended to in this case; which is, that we never exalt the reasoning faculty above what is written: But that, after having fairly employed it within it's proper sphere to ascertain the divinity of Revelation, we then submit it to whatever appears to be agreeable to the Word of God, and confirmed by his authority. There are many things in Scripture, delivered by Christ and his Apostles, confessedly beyond our comprehension: But that these sacred writings are the oracles of God, containing the whole of his will to mankind; and that they are consequently the only certain standard of our belief and practice, are simple propositions level with the capacity of every reasonable enquirer. And whereas all things necessary to man's present duty, and to his eternal salvation, are comprized therein; so are all such things answerably clear, and
easy

easy to be apprehended in them. There is no need of any visible infallible Guide and Interpreter, with respect to the essentials of Christianity, provided men's hearts are upright and their affections sincere. Hence alone are they possessed of an unerring criterion, even the balance of the Sanctuary, ever at hand to detect the false weights and false measures of those, who would obtrude their mischievous tenets upon the faith and consciences of Christians. With this it was that the Captain of our Salvation repelled the insolent temptations of the Devil; and by the same spiritual weapon may we in like manner be enabled to quench all the fiery darts of his wicked Agents and Ministers.

Hither then let us bring their doctrines and practices to the test. — To instance in a few particulars — Do any now, under the meridian of Gospel-light,

light, pretend to extraordinary illuminations, instantaneous impulses, and feelings (as some are pleased to express it) of the Holy Ghost? Let them prove their pretensions by the fruits of that blessed Spirit: And these are declared by St. Paul to be love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, and the like. Whatsoever then is contrary to any of these, whatever tends to interrupt the order and quiet of society, by introducing divisions into a Church truly apostolical, or factions into a well constituted state, cannot possibly be of God; but “is earthly, sensual, devilish.” Again — Would any delude us, whether under colour of argument or miracle, to the worship of Images, or of Angels, and Saints departed; or to place an impious confidence in bare outward ceremony and superstition? It is plainly written, “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and Man, the man Christ Vol. II. C Jesus;”

Jesus ;” and that “ without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” — Thus too, in general answer to the various and unscriptural attempts of those, who would either beguile us of the promises made to faith, or evacuate the needfulness of good works ; or who go about to flatter men into a reliance upon the pure mercy of the divine Being, or to disarm his threatenings against impenitent sinners ; or in any respects oppose the established truths of the gospel ; we have the warrant of an Apostle, that “ though an Angel from Heaven preach unto us any other gospel than that we have received, let him be accursed.” — In short, the perfect Word of God, as long ago committed to the Bible, or Canon of Scripture, to which not a tittle is to be added, nor one jot to be diminished from it, by any human authority whatsoever, is that sovereign touchstone, by which the Spirit of every Teacher is to be tried ; that

indisputable

indisputable principle of religious knowledge, to which the subtle reasonings and elaborate disquisitions of the wise and learned are ultimately to be submitted.

Not that Revelation precludes the usefulness of human learning—it would be absurdity itself to entertain any such wild and enthusiastical conceit. A sufficiency in this respect being absolutely necessary for the explanation of many things in Scripture hard to be understood; and which ignorant and perverse minds are ever gratified in wresting to the destruction of themselves and others. Even the attainment of different languages, so requisite to a critical interpretation of the sacred writings, is now become a task of itself no less irksome than it is expedient. And a thorough knowledge in general of the various and important matter contained in them, must be allowed to require as good parts

and as diligent application, as any human science whatsoever. Nay, to the watchful labours of studious and indefatigable men are we at this day indebted, under the Providence of God, for the Scriptures themselves in their original purity ; and moreover for the happy reformation of Christ's Church from the encroachments of error, spiritual tyranny and superstition ; for which the Inhabitants of this Land can never be too thankful.

The more therefore our reason is cultivated, and improved by learning and study, the more capable will it be of doing real service to Religion : So long as it acts only in a ministerial capacity, without usurping on the prerogative of Revelation. But when once it quits it's province, and affects to be wise above what is written, it is then high time, it is then indeed every one's business, to
divest

divest it of it's assumed dress, and to bring it down to the naked simplicity of the gospel : According to which God having declared that He will judge all men by Jesus-Christ, it were inconsistent with his wisdom and goodness, not to have given them therein a sufficient rule in all things necessary to their salvation. And as to such things as are not necessary to this, but are rather points of controversy, or of mere speculation ; it cannot surely be construed into an abridgment of human liberty, though we advise those, whose capacities and situations in life disqualify them for deeper researches, to satisfy themselves with those plain articles of faith and lines of precept, which are obvious to common apprehension. Since we may rest assured that He, with whom we have to do, is too righteous a Governor to place the eternal interests of the bulk of mankind beyond the reach of their abilities.

lities. We have his word for it, " He would have all men to be saved ;" and therefore doth he deal with us in a like providential manner respecting our souls and bodies ; by ordaining that the means necessary for the preservation of both should be most easy to be acquired ; leaving withal in either case abundant room for the application of honest industry and ingenuous study.

Christianity is in truth an amazing scheme for the advancement of human happiness ; the profound depths of which the most learned men are utterly unable to fathom ; and which even the Angels, we are told, desire to look into. But so much of it as we are at present concerned to know is easily enough to be apprehended ; happy for the world ! were it as willingly embraced, and conscientiously practised. Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,

Christ, as required in the gospel, and for the benefit of the illiterate set forth in the Catechism of our Church, are such explicit terms of salvation, as, one would think, could puzzle the brain of no rational creature.

And yet, it is very observable, the more ignorant sort of Christians, who have any sense at all of Religion, are most apt to be amazed and captivated with unintelligible divinity. What is still worse, there are certain mystick Teachers gone out into the world, ever forward to avail themselves of this weak side of their brethren; by instilling into them such unwarranted and enthusiastical opinions, as usually terminate in a kind of spiritual intoxication, sometimes distraction. — Now, to attempt the recovery of such by dint of reasoning, whose actuating principle is not subject to reason, (as the fumes of enthusiasm certainly are not)

and consequently to exhort them to try the spirits, *i. e.* the doctrines and practices of their Leaders, whether they are of God, would, I am persuaded, be altogether vain and ineffectual. Hence however must appear to every sound mind the propriety and great expediency of trying the spirits in general, before the passions are engaged, and the will betrayed; and of taking the written word of Revelation only for our supreme direction; in opposition to the inward lights of the Enthusiast on the one side, and to the unwritten traditions of the Romanist on the other: Both alike incompetent and very dangerous Guides to be entrusted with a man's salvation.

— Upon the whole—There are, and ever will be, a great number of souls in the Christian World, who for want either of a natural good capacity, or of the improvements of education, have little ability

ability to judge for themselves ; and are therefore under a necessity of receiving their religious impressions for the most part from the examples and instructions of other men. A consideration, which as it demonstrates the utility of established Pastors and Teachers, at whose lips the people may seek and receive knowledge ; so does it indicate withal the importance of their sacred function, upon which the interests of Religion so much depend ; and the obligations they are under to a faithful discharge of it. In regard to both which particulars, give me leave to bring to your remembrance, and submit to your candid application, the gracious conduct of our common Lord and Master : Who well foreseeing how many of his weak but willing Disciples in every age must unavoidably be led much more by authority than private judgment ; and sensibly affected with the dangers they would be exposed

exposed to upon that account from false Prophets and evil Seducers ; was pleased so far to consult their security, as to denounce a very remarkable threatening against all those who should take advantage of their weakness to abuse and mislead them, contained in these awful words, with which I shall conclude —
“ Whosoever shall offend one of these
“ little ones which believe in me, it
“ were better for him that a mill-stone
“ were hanged about his neck, and that
“ he were drowned in the depth of the
“ sea. Wo unto the world because of
“ offences ; for it must needs be that
“ offences come ; but wo to that man
“ by whom the offence cometh.”

SERMON

S E R M O N XVII.

LUKE, xvi. 8.

And the Lord commended the Unjust Steward, because he had done wisely: For the Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light.

THERE is no part of our Lord's doctrine more deserving our attention, than what he occasionally delivered in parable: Which, it must be owned, is a method of instruction admirably adapted to prevail with sinful men (who are generally impatient of open reproof) as it shews them their follies in a fair though

though indirect light, and leads them insensibly to an abhorrence of them.

This is evidently the case of the particular parable now under consideration; in which is represented a Steward of some rich man, who for breach of trust, and bad administration, was about to be removed from the profitable employment. Upon which melancholy prospect he providently enough considers how to secure himself a maintenance after he should lose his place. And here, the first way it seems he thought of, and that truly a very reasonable one, was to earn his livelihood by hard labour, such as letting himself out to dig for a dayly hire; but as he had never been brought up to this, he could not find in his heart to make the experiment. What then must he do? Why he argues right, the consequence of idleness is certain beggary; but though he could not dig, yet to beg he was
ashamed,

ashamed, as indeed he might well be. At last he resolves upon this artful, and, as the world goes, most effectual expedient; viz. to call unto him his Lord's debtors, and take a favourable account of their debts; for instance, where an hundred measures of oil were due, to allow fifty; and instead of an hundred measures of wheat, to make an entry only of fourscore; that by so doing he might ingratiate himself with them, and engage their kindness in return, when he should so soon stand in need of it. — Now this coming to his Lord's ears, he commended the unjust Steward, because he had done wisely: *i. e.* He took notice of his dishonesty, and without doubt discarded him for ever upon that account; but at the same time could not help admiring his shrewdness and sagacity, in that he had acted so craftily for himself, though he had not dealt honestly by Him.

This

This is the whole of the parable; upon which our Saviour forms the observation in my text, that "The Children of this World are in their generation wiser than the Children of Light."

The truth is, the end of this allusion was to upraid those who pretend to Religion, and the expectation of a future happy state, called here "the Children of Light," for not shewing as much foresight, in order to insure to themselves those heavenly and eternal joys; as cunning, worldly-minded men, called here "the Children of this World," commonly exert, for the procuring only a more comfortable subsistence in this transitory life.

And, it must be owned, the reproach is at this day, as it has been in every age, but too just, the application but too seasonable. For among the many
that

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that believe the gospel, nay that make it their principle and profession to secure the everlasting advantages of another world, how few are there who pursue that great end with half so much earnestness and perseverance, as the wise of this world do whatsoever they set their hearts upon? — The further use then I would make of the Text, is,

First, To point out to you in general, how far we are concerned to imitate the Wisdom of this Unjust Steward: — And,

Secondly, To make an application of some particulars suggested in this Parable, for our excitement to virtuous Wisdom.

1. Now it cannot be that we are required to imitate the injustice of this Steward, though commended by his Lord,

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ingenuity

Lord, *i. e.* commended by him in a manner not unusual with good men, who are apt to admire the tricks and artifices of designing knaves, though they by no means approve of them. For dishonesty, how craftily soever conducted, is certainly no point of true wisdom, but on the contrary the worst policy in the world ; always attended with present inconvenience, fear, and danger : And though sometimes it may be successful to the obtaining it's proposed end, yet is it seldom effectual to maintain it long, never without some loss far more considerable than it's acquisition. However, since we are sent by Solomon to the ant, bid to consider her ways and be wise ; and are likewise taught by our Blessed Lord, a greater than Solomon, to learn wisdom, not only from the irrational part of God's creation, the fowls of the air, but from the inanimate also, the lilies of the field ; let it neither surprize
nor

nor offend us, though we be here instructed by the same heavenly Teacher, to promote our real interests by observing with what ingenuity and cunning wicked men carry on their's, how false and destructive soever at the last. For it is very possible to make a good use of a bad example ; nor is it to be doubted but that serpent-like defensive prudence, so visible, and indeed so necessary in the world, is in great measure owing to the baser arts of injurious and offensive men. Our point then is carefully to separate the wisdom and foresight of this Steward from the iniquity of his proceeding; that so we may improve upon his better part, and become as wise at least as he was, to a much nobler purpose.

Indeed if we reflect a little on the behaviour of those, who are commonly and deservedly called the Wise of this World, it is to be feared the very best

Christians may find reason enough to lament and accuse themselves for their remissness, upon comparing the inequality of their labours with those of worldly men; and withal the disproportion of the rewards for which they severally strive. With what care and circumspection, with what steadiness and resolution, do far the greater part of mankind provide, maintain, and further their temporal interests? How do they "rise up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness," for the accomplishing their end, and satisfying their expectations? And alas! what is their end, what their expectations? but to add a little to the comforts of a short life, which perhaps after all is not in their power. I am here only speaking of such as are honestly industrious, and endeavour to better their circumstances by a warrantable application to business. But, it must be confessed, there are, and they

they no inconsiderable number, who (like the unjust Steward) are wonderfully circumspect, and take an infinite deal of pains to promote their covetous or ambitious schemes at any rate; at the expence of honour, integrity, and conscience. And what the mighty end of so much wisdom and diligence, but, instead of peace at the last, the laying up for themselves a certain store of horror, of tribulation and anguish? — In the meanwhile what motives can be wanting to such as own Religion for their guide, in order to quicken their 'endeavours, and support their perseverance? They have the promises of this life, that God will never leave nor forsake them; they have the promises of the next, that He himself will be their exceeding great reward. Happiness, eternal happiness is before them, and what is still more, the terrors of everlasting torments are behind, to urge them on in the pursuit of

it. Yet in the midst of so powerful, almost irresistible excitements, how few are there who imitate the foresight and attention of worldly men, in endeavouring to advance themselves in the kingdom of Christ which is not of this world, and wherein we are informed there are many mansions, different degrees of glory prepared for different degrees of virtue. The generality of Christians rest themselves satisfied in those religious observances, which cost them least trouble, or least expence: To give a denial to the importunities of sensual appetite, keep out of the way of temptation, disdain unwarrantable fashions, and bad examples, requires such a degree of virtuous resolution as, however necessary, not many think themselves concerned to acquire; and it is but here and there one is found, who has courage, or rather wisdom and policy enough, to trust Heaven with any considerable part of
of

of his possessions. So little inclined are we to lay out our labour upon that which will most profit us ; and so little faith have we in that fund of divine goodness, which will infallibly restore us an hundred-fold. But surely, would men lay the truth to their hearts ; would they examine the tendency and design of those heavenly precepts, which our Blessed Lord delivered for our instruction and guidance ; would they compare, as far at least as Reason and Revelation will permit them to compare, the things present with the things eternal ; they must needs be convinced that they have something else to do in this world, besides merely providing for their subsistence in it ; that it is their duty and interest to lay hold on every opportunity of improving their immortal souls in true knowledge and virtue, and of doing good to their fellow-creatures ; though the one be attended with self-denial, the

other with cost; that these are the main tests of our obedience in this probationary state; and that according as we have observed or neglected these, we shall be sentenced to our everlasting habitations.

In a word — The example of this unjustly wise Steward, wise only in respect of this world, may very naturally, and in good reason should teach every considering person to be wise unto salvation. For how easy the inference? If a man of this world, who has no farther views than what the present life offers, shall employ so much iniquitous art and fore-sight in order to secure to himself a temporal subsistence; surely it is worth my greatest care and circumspection, who have hope in another life, to provide for eternity. Shall He lie and cheat to make the Devil his friend? and shall not I be just and charitable to make God mine? Shall He so zealously worship the Mammon

mon of Unrighteousness to the end he may be rewarded with shame and misery? and shall not I serve the Lord of Heaven and earth, who hath promised everlasting happiness to them that obey Him? This, every one sees, is nothing more than what common sense dictates; and might without doubt be a powerful lesson of instruction, if seriously applied to the many instances of false wisdom, which men so commonly value themselves upon, and by which it must be acknowledged, they too often thrive in this uncertain world, the wisdom of the covetous, the fraudulent, and ambitious. But I pass on, in the second place, to make an application of some particulars suggested in the parable before us, for our excitement to virtuous wisdom.

2. And here, Forasmuch as God is represented under the character of a Rich Man having a Steward; let us take oc-

caſion from this circumſtance to reflect within our own breſts, what is the quality of any man living, but that of a Steward to the Supreme Lord and Governor of the Universe? I ſay of any man living; for the richeſt and moſt powerful are no better; and the pooreſt have ſome advantages committed to their truſt, ſufficient to entitle them to the ſame denomination. Wealth and honour are not the only talents worthy our regard; health and ſtrength, underſtanding and knowledge, time and opportunity, are all of them diſpenſations of the ſame good Providence, and are ſeverally “given unto men to profit withal.” Even the ſufferings and afflictions of life are put into our hands for uſe and improvement; and like baſe goods well managed may turn to a large account, and highly credit the merchant’s induſtry.

It

It is true we are ready to call whatever we are at present possessed of, *Our Own*, and are mighty apt to reason every one within himself, and say, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?” From which mistaken principle proceed most of the irregularities of the world: But this is surely to forget ourselves, whence we came, whose we are, and on whom we rely. Property, strictly speaking, is not for man; and when applied to him should be understood to mean no more than a distinction of that personal trust with which individuals are charged; which they are to manage to good purposes, and for which they are accountable. The only true proprietor of all things is God. He indeed allows us gratefully to enjoy, what he bountifully dispenses for our use; and our happiness is, the better use we make of the blessings of Providence, the more effectually we do enjoy them.—Which
state

42 S E R M O N XVII.

state of the case if it be true, as assuredly it is; if we are all of us Stewards to one common Lord, who hath distributed to men their talents, or proportion of means, according to his good pleasure, who best knows what is profitable for us, to some five, to some ten, to some one; we cannot then but believe it our duty and interest, whatever our abilities may be, to employ them, not after a wilful and arbitrary manner, but to his honour who hath entrusted them to our care: For what saith St. Paul? "It is required in Stewards that a man be found faithful."

Again, Was the Steward in the text to be put out of his stewardship? So is every one of Us; not, it is to be hoped, for bad administration, (though indeed the sentence of death was first pronounced upon sin) however now by the very condition of our fallen nature. Man's
life

life is not in his own power; how then can the things he possesseth but for the use of that life, be called his own? Both are determinable at the will of Him, whose prerogative it is to give and to take away. This is too evident a truth to need any other argument, than what the event of every day offers for our instruction. Men are continually called upon to surrender up their trust, and to quit their station in this world, some at a longer, others at a shorter warning, or perhaps no warning at all; which, as it should teach us to think rightly of our station here, so also to be prepared to leave it in any instant of time. But neither is Death the only messenger that summons us from our respective employments: It sometimes pleases our Heavenly Master, to take away his goods from the unprofitable servant, and transfer them to better hands, even in this life, putting down one, and setting up another.

another. Thus did He by his vineyard in the parable, *i.e.* his Church; destroying those wicked husbandmen, the unbelieving Jews, and letting it out to other husbandmen, even the believing Gentiles, who might render him the fruits in their seasons. And the same hath he declared in a special manner to be the general method of his governing with respect to the advantages of grace; which shall be taken away from Him that hath not, *i.e.* that uses them not, and be given to Him that hath, *i.e.* that improves them. — So that if we consider the necessity we are under of quitting our Stewardship one time or other; and the uncertainty of the time when we may be called upon to that end; together with the several ways whereby it may be taken away from us, either by an earlier or later departure out of life, or by the just judgment of God, leaving us destitute of means, which we obstinately

nately neglect or misuse; I say, upon all these considerations it concerns us to administer our trust with all virtuous wisdom, whilst we have opportunity to improve it to our future and eternal interest; that at what time soever we shall be no longer Stewards, we may be received into everlasting habitations.

For, let it be considered in the last place, that the Steward in the parable was not barely to resign his office, but withal to give an account of it: And in like manner are we, every man for himself, to answer before the tribunal of God, for the good or ill management of our respective occupations in this life. And then a new state of things shall commence; a state of rewards and punishments, as we shall appear to have merited the one, or deserved the other. If we have lived in a manner answerable to those relations and capacities (in which
 Providence

Providence hath placed us) by honouring God, and doing good to our fellow-creatures; how comfortable that reckoning! when, having the merits of Christ on our side, to sanctify our good endeavours, we shall be entitled to the joy of our Lord. On the other hand, if peradventure we be found to have wasted our Master's goods by a misapplication of them; to have impaired our health and strength by intemperance and debauchery, corrupted our minds and consciences by dishonesty, profaneness, and irreligion, or have consumed our substance in idleness or riot; how dreadful the apprehension of judgment at that awful season! when the mercy as well as justice of God shall be glorified in the condemnation of such sinners, as have despised the riches of his goodness, and ungratefully dishonoured Him in his own Gifts.

Whatever

Whatever therefore be our talents,
 whatever our condition in this world;
 whether we be high or low, rich or poor;
 let us in no wise forget that we are all
 Stewards to the same universal Lord;
 but rather let that earthly wisdom which
 directs men in the pursuit of their tem-
 poral welfare, serve for a good lesson to
 Us in the more important concerns of
 our eternal salvation; being well assured
 that that just and merciful Judge, to
 whom All must render an account with-
 out respect of Persons, will require more
 of them to whom he hath committed
 much, and will plenteously reward those
 who have been faithful in a little.

S E R M O N XVIII.

MATTHEW, x. 16.

*Be Ye therefore wise as Serpents, and
harmless as Doves.*

IT appears from the context that this excellent advice was immediately and peculiarly directed by Christ to those twelve Disciples, whom he first commissioned to preach and propagate his new Religion : And with what singular propriety I need not say. — But forasmuch as every one who names the name of Christ is equally concerned to pass the time of his sojourning here in this world
with

with a religious circumspection; wherein he will certainly find occasions enough for the exercise of his wisdom, and but too many trials of his innocence, it can neither be improper, nor without it's use to consider the words as an admonition to Christians in general. — And in this view I shall endeavour, First, to state the nature of that innocent Wisdom here enjoined — in order to recommend and enforce, Secondly, the culture of so valuable an endowment; — premising only, that the terms of similitude made use of in the text, “ *wise as Serpents,*” “ *harmless as Doves,*” are plainly proverbial expressions, meant to denote each of those qualities in the highest degree; and were upon that account joined together by our heavenly Instructor, to teach us in a familiar way of speaking, that we cannot be too wary in our conduct, provided innocence be a guard upon our wisdom; nor too

harmless therein, whilst discretion adds a grace to our innocence.

1. Now, to be harmless in our lives and conversations, which lies at the foundation of all virtue, and should therefore be the principal care of every Christian, is (as St. Paul speaks) to keep always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards Men. — There is a certain line of duty, easily enough discovered by an honest mind, that limits our conduct in the several relations we stand in to our God, our Selves, and our Neighbour. And this it concerns us to have always in view; and, as far as in us lies, to make it the constant rule of our religious, our moral, and civil deportment.

If we rob God of his honour, either by neglecting to pay Him that reasonable service He requires at our hands,
the

the sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving; or by blaspheming his Holy Name, Word and Providence; or if we give his glory to another, by setting up the idols of our own corrupt affections in his stead: In any of these and the like cases we act offensively against his divine Majesty; who, though infinitely above receiving any real detriment from our proceedings, yet looks upon profaneness as an affront to his nature, which is Holiness itself, and will accordingly resent it. — Again,

It is required of us that we be harmless toward our own Selves: Which though it may seem an unnecessary injunction, because no man ever hated, but on the contrary every one loveth and cherisheth himself; yet is it undeniably certain that every instance of sin, with whatever pleasures or advantages it may be attended, is an actual violation

of a man's best and truest interest ; as it enfeebles the soul, sets it at enmity with God, in whom alone it can be happy, and renders it obnoxious to everlasting punishment. Neither are his outward circumstances less injured through the malignity of vice ; which never fails to impair the health, ruin the fortune, and sink the reputation of him who commits it.

But the direction to live harmless, according to the common acceptation of the word, principally relates to our behaviour in a social capacity ; and imports that we give no offence to our Neighbour in any respect ; that we injure him not in his person, his professions, or his credit. A peaceful and inoffensive carriage is no small part of true Religion ; which cannot subsist where envying and strife is ; because “ there ” (as St. John speaks) “ is confusion, and every evil work.” Well then might the
Saviour

Saviour of the World charge his Apostles, those messengers of peace, to conduct themselves without offence in that public and important office to which He had ordained them; And well does it become all, who profess themselves Disciples of the same Lord, to be harmless in all their actions, to hurt no one by word or deed, thereby approving themselves the Sons of God without rebuke. And thus much for this dovelike innocence prescribed in the text.

Which, if duly observed, will help us the better to understand that other branch of the admonition, "Be ye wise as Serpents;" since they are both very reconcileable, and must be practiced in conjunction. Nay, either virtue may be truly said to be indebted to the other for it's very being; because it is not possible for a man to be innocent without some degree of wisdom, or to be

really wise without innocence.—Let no one then conceive himself to be wise, in that he can go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter; unhappily versed in the mean arts of tricking and imposture, whereby to depress his neighbour or advance himself; because the Lord (as the Apostle testifies) is the avenger of all such. He, unto whom all hearts are open, will bring every secret thing into judgment. Such indeed is the wisdom of the Children of this World; of whom our Saviour observes, that they are wiser in their generation than the Children of Light — [*i. e.* worldly-minded men are for the most part more ingenious and diligent in pursuit of their temporal interests, than those who are enlightened by the knowledge of true religion are in providing for their eternal welfare.] But that wisdom which does not proceed from good principles (whatever it may be in the sight of men) is in the esteem of
 God,

God, who judgeth of things according to the truth, but vanity and folly. "The wisdom of the world, saith St. Paul, is foolishness with God." This is not the wisdom of the Serpent we are directed to imitate in a cautious self-preserving conduct; but the cunning of that old Serpent, who was a liar from the beginning, the father of treachery and deceit. It must be acknowledged that the concerns of the present life, as well as of that which is to come, require a good deal of wariness and attention, considering the malice and wickedness of many, with whom we are obliged to converse; and the errors and temptations to which we are always liable. And so long as we act upon the defensive, our sagacity is honest, our foresight commendable: But to attempt the making any acquisitions by oppression and wrong, by artifice and fraud, is to be guilty of bad policy; which, though it may possibly

succeed here, must infallibly be accounted for hereafter.

Hence then, from the double precaution delivered in the text, and which I have hitherto been explaining, we may rest assured that to behave inoffensively in all branches of his conduct is the primary duty of every Disciple of Christ: And further, that consistently with this restraint he cannot act too wisely. For harmless wisdom what is it but Prudence? a cardinal virtue both in the moral and Christian system. The happy effects of which I proceed in the next place to point out in some principal instances, and so recommend it to your observance.

2. And here—whoever allows himself to reflect upon the nature and danger of that probationary state, wherein he is placed in this world, must needs be sensible

fible that much virtuous wisdom is necessary toward securing alike his present and future happiness.—If a man does not look to himself, if he is not watchful at home, even his own passions will betray him into numberless extravagancies, productive of nothing but disquietude and vexation in the end. Hence the knowledge of a man's self was a fundamental article in the heathen philosophy; and much more so is it in the Christian Religion; which hath discovered to us our corruption and infirmities, together with the occasion of them, in a manner unknown to those darker ages. Experience almost daily may convince us, that we are very liable to be drawn aside from our duty, through the untoward motions of our own appetites; which do therefore require a most suspicious guard, especially in those cases which tend more directly to some habitual and beloved gratification. And this

is

is doubtless a great part of that self-denial prescribed in the gospel; consisting not literally in the cutting off a limb, or plucking out an eye, nor in such acts of mortification as are beyond the powers of our nature; but in a prudent abstinence from such gratifications as, though innocent in themselves, may, to particular tempers and complexions, be of dangerous consequence.

— It is then a principal point of discretion, what the wise man recommends, to “keep the heart with all diligence, because out of it are the issues of life”—*i. e.* to look inward upon ourselves with a jealous and prying eye; to regulate our thoughts, curb our affections, watch our faculties; because upon the observance or neglect hereof, depends in great measure the good or ill success of our outward conduct. — Again,

The

The world, and the iniquities of them that dwell therein, demand no small share of that inoffensive wisdom here enjoined, to be a grace to our actions, as well as a guide to our steps. It was the caution delivered by St. Paul to the Ephesians, and in them to all, "See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise," *i. e.* not as the Gentiles who know not God, but as those who are instructed by the heavenly doctrine of our Saviour — "redeeming the time because the days are evil."

Indeed all times are not alike evil, and there were some particular evils, such as heresies and persecutions, more incident to that early age of Christianity, wherein the Apostle wrote: Yet as our Lord observed, "Sufficient unto the day, (*i. e.* every day,) is the evil thereof," — so there are no times wherein there is not evil enough to excite the diligence,
and

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and exercise the foresight, of every considering person. Even the common concerns of life are not to be carried on to any good purpose without circumspection ; the want of which will ever be attended with indigence and distress. So necessary in this fallen state is the care of the mind, as well as the sweat of the brow, toward a comfortable and peaceful subsistence. For though all anxious disquietude and repining be indeed forbidden in the gospel, as inconsistent with the belief of a wise and good Providence ; yet is prudence on man's part the likeliest means to procure a blessing on God's.

But what more particularly requires a cautious and circumspect behaviour, is the wretched craftiness of those, who lie in wait to deceive others into vice and error, and who are never better pleased than when they accomplish their wicked purpose ; first leading them into
licentiousness,

licentiousness, and then into a contempt of Religion. Which is in truth the readiest way to do their business effectually; the transition from a habit of sinning to a spirit of infidelity, being of all other the most easy and natural. They who go on still in their wickedness cannot choose but wish there is no God, at least no such God as Revelation describes, because they cannot but dread the effects of his displeasure. And how far men's inclinations influence their belief is very obvious in ordinary cases; most persons being apt enough to believe those things true which they have a mind should be so. But alas! this is but a miserable way of evading the force of reason, and remorse of conscience; and should therefore be a warning how we associate with wicked company, or are led away by their devices, which must necessarily bring us so much unhappiness at the last. For "with the froward thou shalt learn frowardness,"

faith

saith Holy David : And “ can a man take fire into his bosom, and not be burnt ? ”
saith Solomon : No more can he listen to the temptations of ungodly persons, and preserve himself innocent.

Moreover, lastly, much religious wisdom is absolutely requisite, in order to secure us from the malice and stratagems of those evil and subtle spirits, who by inward impulses and secret suggestions, are continually prompting men to sin : And that, let me observe, sometimes and in some places when and where they are least suspected. We read that “ on a day when the Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also amongst them : ” And we cannot question his ready endeavours to corrupt even our best services, with the leaven perhaps of vanity and lukewarmness, hypocrisy or superstition. Now, to elude these spiritual enemies of our peace and salvation,
whatsoever

whatsoever good thing we set about, it behoves us to do it with a proper caution and godly sincerity: "To keep our foot," *i. e.* to consider whither we are going and what affections we carry along with us, "when we go to the House of God;" to offer up our prayers with a becoming devotion, and a mind free from all uncharitableness—to listen to the word with an attentive and honest heart—and to receive the Blessed Sacrament in remembrance of what our Redeemer did and suffered for us, with all pious gratitude, holy awe, and serious resolution. By thus performing our sacred exercises, not with the outward man only, but with the understanding also, we may too depend upon an increase of wisdom from that heavenly blessing, which God in his mercy hath annexed to a due observance of the means ordained by Him.

Seeing then the nature and importance
of

of that innocent sagacity prescribed in the text, may we endeavour to have our souls possessed of it ! learning (as the Apostle directs) “to be ever wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.” The whole of Morality and Religion is eminently comprized in Holy Writ, under the title of Wisdom ; and all manner of wickedness is no less emphatically termed Folly : And certain it is, how much soever an iniquitous person may pretend to wisdom, yet, because he is wise only to do evil, but to do good hath no knowledge, (as the Prophet complained of Judah) therefore his claim is ill-grounded, his conceit irrational. But where innocence and discretion meet together, there true wisdom is, a light to our paths, and a blessing to our endeavours.

S E R M O N X I X .

PROVERBS, xxx. 8, 9.

*Give me neither Poverty, nor Riches ; feed
me with Food convenient for me : Lest
I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who
is the Lord ? or lest I be poor, and steal,
and take the Name of my God in vain.*

IT is evidently of divine appointment,
seeing the present constitution of
things renders it necessary, that there
should be a mixture of rich and poor
persons in this world. “ The Rich and
the Poor (saith Solomon) meet together ;
the Lord is the Maker of them all.” And

He who made all, we may rest assured, notwithstanding these civil distinctions, which exalt some and depress others, careth for all alike. A consideration of great use toward an habitual contentment in the several stations, which a wise and good Providence hath thought proper to assign us.

But though resignation to the Will of Heaven be confessedly our duty in every state; yet is it by no means inconsistent with this virtuous principle, to beseech Almighty God, who knoweth whereof we are made, that He would be graciously pleased so to dispose and modify our respective circumstances, as may best conduce to our personal happiness here and hereafter. For it is very obvious, that there are many and great temptations peculiarly incident to certain situations in life, which a good man would not willingly be exposed to. Neither
hath

hath any thing in general a more pernicious tendency to corrupt the morals of mankind, than the excessive affluence, or pinching indigence of their outward condition. — Wherein is seen the piety and wisdom of Agur's prayer to God in my text, — "Give me neither Poverty, nor Riches." —

It will, I am aware, be no easy task to convince men of the equal propriety of this petition in both instances. All readily enough concur in deprecating the mischiefs of sordid Poverty; but who can find in their hearts to offer up a solemn prayer against beloved Riches? The case is, we are apt to take our estimate of things from the prejudices of sense only. Hence our aversion to a mean and abject fortune, merely on account of the inconveniences and troubles, the distresses and miseries, which unavoidably attend it. Hence too an insatiable

lust after wealth and abundance ; as being the pleasing source of every worldly gratification ; the groundwork of power, the support of vain-glory, and the food of luxury. Whereas this pious suppliant considered either circumstance, as all should do, in quite a different light ; not as simply evil in themselves, but as inducements to the commission of evil. He dreaded both alike in a religious view, conscious of the perils to which they are equally liable ; and therefore prayed against both : That he might not be tempted, through any incidental quality of his station, to displease his Maker, and hazard the interests of his soul.

Thus much is plain from the nature and causes of his fears, assigned and specified in the prayer itself.—The best and most general use I can make of which, is to set before you the reasonableness of it—by enquiring,

First,

First, into the reality of those spiritual dangers, peculiar to the highest and lowest conditions of life. Whence will appear,

Secondly, the many desirable advantages of that Mediocrity of Fortune, (well expressed by Food convenient for us) which happily falls to the lot of far the greater part of Mankind.

1. My first concern is with the spiritual dangers annexed to the extreme of Riches. —“ Give me not Riches ; lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, who is the Lord ?”

It is a melancholy reflection, that the more men receive at the hand of God, the less inclined they should be to be thankful ; less disposed to consecrate his gifts to the purposes for which He bestowed them ; viz. the furtherance of

his glory, the benefit of their fellow creatures, and, let me add, the comfort and satisfaction of their own minds. For depend upon it, God never dispenseth talents with an intent to deceive or hurt any one. It is his design indeed to put the sincerity of our virtue to the test by the good or bad application we make of them. But “let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man. Then is every man tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed.”

The good things of the world, when honestly acquired, are without doubt the gift of God : And if duly employed in his service, to the ends before mentioned, may very properly be esteemed a blessing : Not only as they administer to the temporal necessities, conveniences and rational enjoyments of the possessors themselves ;

themselves ; their relations and friends, neighbours and dependants ; but as being instrumental also to the increase of their own final felicity. The Servant in the parable, who, having been entrusted by his Lord with five talents, gained other five, was made Ruler over five cities. An allusion of notable encouragement to all who abound, so to improve their greater substance, that their reward may be great in Heaven. Not that by improving their substance, we are to understand the doubling it in a literal sense ; by adding field to field, and house to house. This must needs be far from our Lord's meaning ; the tenor of whose doctrine may convince any, that a covetous temper will prove but a bad title to superior happiness, at the great Day of Retribution. The only effectual method of laying up treasures above, is to do good with them here below. And one reason why a charitable and virtuous use

of Riches will enlarge the future recompence is, because in the present corrupt state of things, the temptations to abuse them are so many and importunate.

What those dangers are, which in a special manner attend upon superfluous wealth, may be collected from the words before us, viz. an excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures—a contempt for Religion—and an affectation of independancy. Mischiefs, that by an easy and almost natural transition follow upon each other. “ Give me not Riches, said this wise observer of men and manners, lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, who is the Lord ?”

Luxury and intemperance are indeed the first and leading vices, into the commission of which a commanding fortune is but too apt to delude the unhappy owner; strictly speaking unhappy, when
harrassed

harrassed with the miserable effects of excess and riot. For what pleasure from affluence to a diseased body, and a broken constitution? untimely and irrecoverably broken through indulged and therefore unruly appetites.

Nor is this all—Enflamed passions war against the soul: They preclude serious thoughts, fear the conscience, and render it insensible to every good impression. Hence an unenquiring, ignorant disbelief of divine truths; and a neglect of holy ordinances; usually followed by a forgetfulness of God, and a virtual denial of his authority and providence; saying, if not with the mouth, at least in practice, “Who is the Lord?”

Such is the fatal progress when the first step is mistaken. Men, trusting in the multitude of their riches, take not God
for

for their confidence, and then strengthen themselves in their wickedness.

Far be it from us however to imagine that temperance and humility, faith and piety, are incompatible with the most opulent circumstances. This were to charge God foolishly, and to calumniate his favours. Happy for the world! happy for themselves! there are who are no less rich in good works, than they are in large possessions. And yet so many and notorious have been the contrary examples in every age, that no prudent person, who considers well the general tendency of immense wealth to corrupt the principles and vitiate the morals of men; how much vanity and licentiousness, infidelity and irreligion, are apparently derived from that very source, would make so hazardous a station the object of his prayer; wherein the mightiest fall, and the best with difficulty stand. How much

much more commendable this petition, "Give me not Riches?" in a sense conformable to that model of our Blessed Saviour, "Lead us not into temptation."

2. Proceed we to enquire into the spiritual dangers ever attending the contrary extreme of Poverty.—A right notion of which may serve to encourage men not only to pray, but to watch and guard against it. For though the lowest degree of penury may be sometimes owing to the appointment of Him who sent us into the world; yet is it too often the consequence of idleness, prodigality and vice. And God in this latter sense may be properly enough said to *give* it, since in the ordinary course of causes and effects it is the present punishment which he inflicts upon human folly.

Now the miseries of this forlorn state are not only great in themselves, but
commonly

commonly greater in their immoral issues. And these are what the text leads me to reflect on — “ Give me not Poverty, lest being poor I steal, and take the Name of my God in vain.”

One would incline to hope that the troubles and sufferings of the indigent and necessitous during this transient life, should excite them to make some happier provision for themselves in a future and better world ; where to the godly and virtuous of every condition there will be no more want, and no more sorrow. Nor is it to be doubted that this is the pious care and consolation of many amongst them. And God, who knows the violence of the temptations they have to encounter, will reward them accordingly. But who does not see and lament, that the generality of these are no less wicked in their deportment, than they are wretched in their fortunes ? and therefore in the
broad

broad way to be wretched too for ever. The unwearied Adversary of Mankind, ever ready to take advantage of our weakest side, prompts the poor to steal. Instead of humility and patience, and working with their hands what is useful to society; the only certain means of ingratiating themselves with the rich, and procuring a maintenance suitable to their station; what additional misery do they for the most part carve out for themselves and others, by a factious discontent, by debauchery and profaneness, by theft and malice? And surely nothing more need be added to vindicate the wisdom of this prayer, "Give me not Poverty!" and to induce every person to join in it; not *barely* from a motive of worldly convenience, which the most profligate will do, and in which there can be no merit; but from a just sense of those spiritual dangers to which it is subject, and a conscientious

conscientious regard to the welfare of his soul.

From the representation hitherto made of the highest and lowest conditions of life, and of the temptations peculiar to each, will appear under the remaining head of this discourse, the reasonable preference of that Mediocrity of Fortune, well expressed by "Food convenient for us ;" and which falls to the lot of far the greater part of Mankind.

II. That a competent subsistence, or decent sufficiency in a moderate station, is preferable to poverty, is a proposition which needs no proof. The only question is, why such a situation is more to be desired than great riches ? which are evidently incircled with so many advantages, that a desire of them seems altogether natural to beings constituted as
we

we are ; and is withal of much publick benefit, tending to the promotion of industry, arts and commerce, and to the general furtherance of social happiness. In answer to which, let it be first and principally regarded, what I before observed, that this provident person did not pray against riches as evil in themselves, but as temptations to the commission of evil.

We are placed in this world, as in a state of discipline, to furnish our souls with good habits ; and prepare them for an admission after death into the regions of immortality and bliss. Now, whatever circumstances are apt to betray us into measures subversive of this main purpose, are so far undefireable, because of the frailty of our nature. — And such experience teaches us to be the case of splendid affluence, as well as of sordid poverty.

But

But a moderate fortune, or middle state between want and superfluity, is by no means exposed to the dangers of either extreme.

Thus securely situated a man has every requisite to peace and contentment; nor can all the riches of the world procure him more. Sensible of the gifts of Providence, and of his dayly dependance thereon, he is neither inclined to forget his God, nor injure his Neighbour. His revenues are unequal to the expence of luxurious living; he is therefore unacquainted with the miseries both of body and mind, which never fail to attend it. Engaged in some useful calling, he eats the bread of industry and health; and precludes all the evil sollicitations of an idle life.— It were endless to enlarge on the many rational comforts naturally connected with this happier condition (whatever we

we may think) wherein the generality amongst us are providentially placed : Some it is true in a higher, others in a lower degree ; according to that wonderful subordination, which God in his wisdom hath constituted upon earth. All however are to be included in this number, who are free from the pressures of penury, and the temptations of abundance.

Should there notwithstanding be even among these, who imitate the vices of the rich, by intemperance, prodigality, and irreligion ; or who subject themselves to the calamities of the poor, by fraud, rapine, and impiety ; their's be the blame, and their's the punishment : Who will infallibly be brought to a severer account, for the commission of wickedness, in excuse for which they can have nothing to

alledge. The power of the temptation may be considered by a merciful Judge, in alleviation of their guilt, who were more easily beset by it; but what allowance can be expected in behalf of those, who having food convenient for them, *i. e.* supplied with all things proper for their stations, and sufficient to preserve them from such enormities, wilfully resist the divine grace, and presumptuously defeat the blessings of an indulgent Providence?

In a word — God forbid there should be any state of life, whether of Affluence or Poverty, or a safer Mediocrity, wherein we may not work out every one the salvation of his soul! — Men of all ranks bear the same relation to the common Creator and Governor of the World. Christ died for All; and the

the assistances of the Holy Spirit are offered unto All. Therefore, whatever be our temporal circumstances, let it be our constant care, as it is both our duty and interest, to pray to our Father who is in Heaven, that He would give us each day our daily bread, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil — for the sake of his only Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N XX.

EPHESIANS, iv. 26.

Be angry, and sin not.

IT hath pleased the Almighty Creator to implant in the nature of man sundry kinds of passions; in order both to stir him up to action, and to make trial of his obedience. And truly without these busy principles within us, human life (as far as we are capable of judging) would be but an insipid state of being. For though they carry in them not only incitements to good works, but also temptations to such as are evil; yet
 having

having reason and religion to direct us in the due exercise of them, we may be justly satisfied with this our short probation, which is only to prepare us for that future blissful state, where shall be nothing but harmony and peace.—Indeed the laws of Christ are so piercing, and strike so directly at the first motions of the heart, that they may seem in some respects designed to eradicate the passions out of our present frame and constitution: And undoubtedly they were intended to suppress every passion, the object of which is unlawful; and to prevent every vicious tendency from harbouring in the mind: Because gratification being the end of all our desires, therefore to conceive and cherish such as are criminal, is virtually to be guilty of the actions to which they tend. In which sense our Blessed Saviour accuseth him of adultery, who entertains any dishonourable inclinations towards the

wife of another man ; and him of murder, who is but angry with his brother without a cause. — However it is very certain we are possessed of passions for good purposes, seeing they are constituents of our nature, and were so in the time of innocence. Neither is it the design of the Christian Religion to eradicate our affections, but to restrain them within the bounds of justice, temperance and sobriety. The truth of this will appear more fully from considering the particular instance of Anger, which is the subject of my text ; “ Be angry, and sin not.” In which words the Apostle must not be supposed to *exhort* men to anger, to which by reason of their frailty they are but too prone ; and which is ever attended with some danger of lapsing into sin : Neither doth he absolutely forbid them to be angry, as a thing in itself simply sinful ; which, considering it is unavoidable upon some occasions, had

had been an unreasonable injunction : But He may easily be understood as giving a very prudent caution against unwarrantable and vicious anger, either as to the cause or degree of it ; “ Be angry, and sin not ; let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” For the more distinct treating of which subject, I shall endeavour in the first place to point out to you in what cases we may be angry, and yet not sin ; and secondly, what kinds and degrees of anger are to be avoided as sinful.

1. Now anger is an emotion of spirit, either justifiable or otherwise, good or evil, according to it's cause, it's temper, and it's end. If the provocation be just, the anger may be innocent and allowable ; but so far only as it is duly moderated and well intended. Few persons are of so calm a disposition, as not to be in some measure disturbed at the recep-

tion of an injury. Neither is there any thing simply unlawful in this: No, nor in visible acts of resentment, when conducted without breach of charity. We find St. Paul requiring with some warmth the Magistrates of Philippi, who contrary to the privilege of a Roman had beaten him openly uncondemned, and cast him into prison, when they thought to have thrust him out privily, to come themselves and fetch him out. In which case the anger of the person injured, and the submission of the Tyrants were both equally reasonable: Neither can we suppose a like instance of resentment less warrantable in a private Christian, than this was in an Apostle. But, by the way, it is worth observing that He demanded no farther satisfaction for so severe a treatment than the bare acknowledgment of his persecutors; agreeably to that precept of his Divine Master, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and

and if he repent, forgive him : And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." It is impossible but offences will come in whatever station of life our lot shall fall ; and we may be, nay we cannot help being angry : The great caution to be observed is, that we suffer not our passion to get the mastery over our reason, or to invalidate the precepts of our most holy Religion. There is no doubt but Parents may be lawfully angry with disobedient Children : Yet should they always remember that repeated admonition of the Apostle, " Fathers, provoke not your Children to wrath ;" and the reason is, lest they be discouraged. The good of the child is the only thing that can justify the anger of the parent. Such is the example of our common Father which is in Heaven, who chasteneth whom he loveth, and scourgeth every Son

Son whom he receiveth. In like manner is it no less justifiable in Masters to be angry with unprofitable Servants: But unto them too is there an apostolical direction to forbear threatening, that is, any violent exercise of their authority; and that, "because they also have a Master in Heaven." In short, in all such cases the best rule is to distinguish aright betwixt the person and the offence, so as to be angry with the latter; though at the same time to bear a brotherly disposition toward the former. It is true the precept of Christ is, that we "turn our left cheek to him who smiteth us on the right;" that we "give our cloak to him who taketh away our coat;" and that we "go two miles with him who compels us to go one:" In all which cases he may be thought to discountenance every appearance of resentment. But we are to take notice he was then confronting the prejudices of the Jews, who (perhaps for
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the hardness of their hearts) had been indulged the law of retaliation, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth : A law so inconsistent with the genius of that Religion He was about to introduce into the world, that He commands his Disciples rather to expose themselves to farther violence, than resist evil by such acts of revenge. Not that we are under any obligation of humouring the wretch who robs us of our property, but that we had better even submit to this in some instances, than let the passion of revenge transport us beyond the bounds of charity. Courts of Justice indeed are open, and civil Magistrates appointed to pass sentence according to the established laws of the Community ; and both these are providentially ordained for a terror to evil doers,—They should however be no encouragement for men to be hasty in spirit, where matters may be otherwise reconciled with more privacy, and
less

less enmity, than is usual in such public proceedings.

The anger I have hitherto been speaking of, regards only those obvious affronts, which may happen at any time to be offered to our own persons; but there is another kind of it which is so far from being a sin, that it is a generous and commendable grace; I mean that honest indignation with which good men are moved upon any violation of truth and the honour of God. This is commonly distinguished by the name of Zeal, that is, a certain holy fervour arising within pious breasts whenever the glory of God is eclipsed, his name dishonoured, his ordinances prophaned, his sanctuary polluted, or his servants vilified. And the virtue of this sort of anger consists in this, that it never aims at revenge, but only to mend the heart of the sinner, and to turn him from the error of his doings,

doings. Such it was that inflamed Moses the servant of God, when he saw the idolatries of alienated Israel; whose anger is said to have waxed hot, insomuch that he brake the tables of the testimony. And such was the anger of the Blessed Jesus himself, when he exerted his miraculous authority to vindicate the honour of his Father's House, in driving those that prophaned it out of the Temple, and overthrowing the seats of merchandize. So likewise when the Jews by their hypocritical silence seemed to discountenance and disallow the curing of a man on the sabbath-day, it is written, "Jesus looked round about upon them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." But though true rational zeal be only the product of religious minds, and we have such shining examples to follow in the exercise of it; yet is there a false and intemperate species of this also, which often
arises

arises from indiscretion and prejudice. Thus the Apostle testifies of the Jews, that they had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. And we ourselves cannot be ignorant what abominations have been committed under the pretence of doing God service. It is therefore a necessary precaution to sift thoroughly the matter, and likewise to examine our own heart with all diligence, before we suffer it to be fired with a passion, which, if erroneous, may hurry us into the most extravagant and uncharitable actions.— Proceed we then in the second place to enquire what kinds and degrees of anger are to be avoided as sinful.

2. And here the first that offers is that which is conceived without a cause. This is what our Lord so severely threatens as liable to the same judgment with actual murder; and it is indeed too often a forerunner of it, and gave occasion to
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the first instance of that devilish sin. To be angry without a cause, is to be so without any *reasonable* provocation; for there is a real though hidden cause of every man's anger. Pride and vanity, a jealous and credulous temper, with diverse other corruptions of the mind, are usually the sources of unjust wrath. It was the envy of Cain that moved him to slay his brother; not because there was any unrighteousness in Him, but because the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering; but unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect. Another remarkable story to this purpose is recorded of Jonah, who though a holy man, yet out of a secret pride lest he should lose his character as a Prophet, is angry even at God's mercy toward the repenting Ninevites, after that he had threatened their destruction. — The extreme folly and rashness of such behaviour must needs appear to every considerate

derate person ; and since there is no knowing to what lengths an unjustifiable passion may lead a man, it cannot be too much guarded against and suppressed.

The next kind of sinful anger is that which is immoderate, whatever be the cause of it. For though there may have been offence given enough to excite resentment in a man of reason and deliberation ; yet if it work him up into an excess of heat, the degree of it will render it vicious. Besides, there are many concomitant vices which excessive anger seldom fails to produce : Clamour, oaths and execrations, evil speaking, bitterness and revenge, are almost the necessary effects of it ; for indeed how is it possible for a man to govern his words or actions when he has lost the use of that reason whose province alone it is to moderate and correct them ? Rage will furnish itself with weapons ; the tongue being

being the most ready one, is generally the first that is made use of; and truly mischief enough may be done with this little member, when it is thus (as St. James speaks) “set on fire of Hell.”—But intemperate wrath (such is the prevalence of the evil one) is not always vented in bare words; it frequently bursts into acts of violence, and therefore the first risings of a malevolent disposition are to be suppressed with the most attentive care, as we would escape the guilt of murdering our brother, at least in our heart.

Thus dangerous and sinful are any ungovernable fits of passion: And yet if we indulge our anger, and suffer it to be immoderate not in degree only, but in continuance also, it has still more of danger and of sin in it. Hence that admonition of the Apostle, “let not the sun go down upon your wrath;” that is,

let it not harbour in thy breast, nor so much as lodge with thee one night: For this is to give place to the Devil, who will not fail to improve a vice which is so fondly entertained. He that lies down to rest with anger boiling in his veins, will certainly rise with malice and rancour in his heart. The spiritual Adversary will be very busy to insinuate evil suggestions and malicious devices into a mind so fitly disposed to receive them. And what is still worse, whilst we nourish resentment, and are full of revengeful imaginations, we must be utterly deprived of that intercourse with Heaven in prayer and supplication, which is our greatest comfort and defence in this state of infirmity. A man cannot have the assurance to offer up his petitions unto Almighty God, whom he daily provokes, whilst he feels himself inflamed by a spirit of revenge against his Neighbour. Especially too considering that our forgiving

giving others is made the very condition of our being forgiven ourselves : For “ if we forgive men their trespasses, (said our Blessed Lord) your heavenly Father will also forgive you ; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” We are too commanded by St. Paul to “ lift up holy hands without wrath :” And certainly dissension and animosity with men, is no fit temper to prepare us to hold communion with God. Wherefore though our gift be ready to be laid upon the Altar, yet is it a reasonable duty to remember ourselves, to look inwards, and see whether all be quiet and calm there ; that there be no grudge, no anger against our brother. Should we find any, it is then absolutely requisite, either that we go first and reconcile ourselves unto him ; or, if opportunity will not suffice for that, at least that we purge out all leaven of malice, by reconciling ourselves unto

him in our own heart. For under the law no offering of the Lord was to be mingled with leaven ; and now under the gospel God will accept of no oblations that are offered up unto him with the ferment of wrath and malice. Nor can it be supposed that the Holy Spirit, whose temples we are so long as we keep our corrupt nature in subjection to the laws of Christ, will reside within a breast agitated with anger and desperate machinations. Moreover to avenge ourselves by malicious contrivances is to break in upon the prerogative of the Almighty : And therefore the Apostle exhorts rather to give place unto wrath, because it is written, "vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." It is true the Magistrate, as the Minister of God, attends continually on the very business of redressing grievances and wrongs, and to him, if the circumstances of our cause require it, may we lawfully appeal ; but
by

by avenging ourselves, according to the dictates of our own hasty spirits, we intrude upon a sacred office, which in no wise belongs to us, and for the execution of which we are then least qualified when under the influence of passion.

In a word — Seeing the very best persons are subject to anger, the way to secure a passion, which we cannot prevent, from being criminal, is carefully to restrain it within the limits of justice and charity. If we suffer it to arise without any just provocation, or to grow immoderate where there is one, we turn the man into a brute, and are guilty in the sight of God of the worst consequences that may possibly attend it.—Again, if we permit it to continue with us, and nourish it in our bosom, we so long forfeit the mercy of God, and the guidance of his Holy Spirit, and instead of resisting, become voluntary Slaves to, the

Devil. —Whereas too evil dispositions are commonly the secret springs of vicious anger, it will be necessary to watch these with all the strictness of suspicion. A proud heart is apt to be impatient of the most trivial affront, and a false notion of honour is to anger as fuel to the fire. We must therefore learn first to think soberly of ourselves, in order to deal soberly with others. But especially should the forbearance and long-suffering of God towards us miserable sinners, who are continually provoking his divine Majesty, be an effectual lesson against uncharitable wrath, and teach us to be merciful, as our Father in Heaven is merciful.

S E R M O N X X I .

JOHN, vi. 27.

*Labour not for the Meat which perisheth,
but for that Meat which endureth unto
everlasting Life ; which the Son of Man
shall give unto You.*

AMONGST the many Miracles
which our Saviour wrought, for
a testimony to the Jews that He was the
true Messiah ; and at the same time for
the benefit of Mankind, whose nature
He had assumed ; there are two upon
record, which rendered him of great es-
timation with the multitude : And those

were, that mentioned by St. Mark, when
 “He fed four thousand with seven loaves
 and a few small fishes, and they took up
 of the broken meat that was left seven
 baskets full;” and this told us by St. John
 in the verses preceding my text, when
 “He fed about five thousand with five
 barley loaves and two small fishes, and
 they gathered up twelve baskets of the
 fragments which remained over and
 above to them that had eaten.”

These miracles so sensible and con-
 vincing, performed in the presence, and
 to the satisfaction of, such numbers,
 caused the people to flock after him in
 great multitudes; insomuch that He
 could scarce meet with a place where to
 withdraw himself a little, and avoid
 their importunity. They not only tra-
 velled after him by land, but took ship-
 ping, and sought him by sea also, and
 never rested till they found him.— And

one would think surely it must be great zeal and affection that put them upon such troublesome journies ; that they were mightily in love with our Saviour and his doctrine, and that their eagerness in following him denoted an earnest desire they had of that spiritual happiness, that life and immortality, which He brought to light by the gospel. But, it seems, "He who seeth not as man seeth," and who "needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man," discovered a very different motive of their proceeding; that it was not Religion but Self-interest which made them post after him in such forward crowds. "Jesus answered and said unto them, verily verily I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, (which might have convinced you that I was the true Messiah,) but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." He then takes occasion

to

to rebuke them for their ill placed trouble and solicitude ; and withal instructs them to lay out their care, their first and principal care, upon what best deserved, and would infallibly repay it. “ Labour
 “ not, says He, for the meat which per-
 “ isheth, but for that meat which en-
 “ dureth unto everlasting life, which
 “ the Son of Man (a name He fre-
 “ quently applied to himself) shall
 “ give unto you.”

In the words are evidently contained both a dissuasive and an exhortation.— And it shall be the business of the following Discourse, to consider what is implied in the former—In order to illustrate the propriety and importance of the latter.

1. That Religion has sometimes been made a pretence and cloak for Idleness, is a proposition too well known either to
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be denied or proved. It will not therefore be improper to remark, that when our Blessed Saviour forbad his followers to labour after the meat which perisheth, *i. e.* after the necessaries, conveniences, and comforts of the present life, which, it must be allowed, are all of a perishing nature; this is by no means to be understood in so absolute and absurd a sense, as to preclude or discountenance all diligent attention to our respective callings and occupations. Such an interpretation were directly opposite to the injunction of the Apostle, that "if any would not work, (supposing ability so to do) neither should he eat:" And is too no less contrary to that universal sentence pronounced by God himself immediately after the fall, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." So that no umbrage can be taken hence, as if Religion debarred even it's strictest professors the exercise of that honest industry, which
both

both God and the World require at their hands, as necessitous and social Beings.

The meaning of the text is plainly to dissuade men from spending their whole time and care upon the emoluments of a temporal life, without ever troubling themselves about seeking and securing the happiness of that which is eternal. The precept is comparative only, though like many others expressed by way of negative : And is therefore entirely consistent with a proper application to our several employments, for the maintenance of ourselves, and others whom it may be our duty to support ; and moreover, by the blessing of Providence, for an increase of substance ; in order to good and charitable purposes ; thereby laying up in store (as the Apostle exhorts them that are rich) a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.—In short, these words

words of our heavenly Teacher amount to much the same as if He had said, "If ye esteem it worth your while to pursue with such pains and assiduity the uncertain advantages of a being so short and transient ; how much more solicitous should ye be to ensure that rest and peace, that fulness of joy, which remains for the People of God in a future and eternal existence ?"

And in this view of the text who can chuse but acknowledge at first sight the fair and powerful reasoning contained in it ? For surely the more essential any good is to our true happiness, the more highly doth it import us to contend for it. And though the necessities and accommodations of our present indigent state are good and desirable, and such as every prudent man endeavours honestly to acquire, according as God has enabled him ; yet it must be allowed utterly incompatible

compatible with true wisdom, to set our hearts altogether upon those things which perish with the using; and in the mean while to neglect the attainments of virtue and holiness; which alone are effectual to give us satisfaction when all other enjoyments cease, and which are as real and permanent as our immortal souls.

It is confessedly the part of worldly Prudence indeed to attend to these lesser concerns in subordination to his main end and interest; and whoever acts otherwise can never manage to any good purpose. He who neglects the business of his particular calling, must needs in the lower stations of life, come to Poverty. But is it not full as reasonable that the concerns of the present life, even life itself (which is designed as a means not an end) should be rendered subservient to our expectations of a better?

ter? — More especially, if we reflect that the interests of this world and the next are perfectly reconcileable. — Our heavenly Father is well acquainted with our wants; He knoweth that we have need of food and raiment, and many other things not of necessity only, but of comfort and convenience also; neither is there any room to doubt but that that beneficent Being, who freely gave us our life, which is more than meat; and our body, which is more than raiment; will also bless our honest endeavours, and humble trust in his good Providence, for the preservation of them. If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all those things shall in their due proportion be added unto us.

To be diligent in our respective occupations, provided always they be such as are creditable and useful in the world, is indeed so far to do the work of God:
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Such too is the condition of the generality of mankind, that they must labour for their ordinary subsistence. But in the mean time, if whilst we are busy to maintain the body, we neglect and starve the soul; if we take no care to keep alive within us our Christian graces, Faith, Hope, and Charity; those best preservatives against present temptations, and only securities for future happiness; if instead of making our secular employments a means of procuring the blessing of Heaven upon our honest and necessary labours, we suffer these to prevent all our Devotion and Religion; allowing ourselves neither thought nor leisure for holy exercises; we then preposterously defeat the good effects of a commendable industry, by disregarding the one thing needful; and become justly liable to that reproof of our Lord, by labouring only "for the meat which perisheth."

Proceed

Proceed we in the second place, to illustrate the propriety and importance of the exhortation annexed — “ But labour
 “ for that meat which endureth unto
 “ everlasting life, which the Son of Man
 “ shall give unto you.”

2. As it has pleased the divine Wisdom, in many places of Scripture, to comprize all the necessaries of man's natural life under the single article of bread, it's principal support ; so likewise to represent the entire gospel of Christ, it's gracious influences and spiritual advantages, under the similitude of bodily food. And in this sense are the words before us to be understood. — That meat which endureth unto everlasting life is without doubt a true and stedfast faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as He who died for our sins ; and withal a sincere obedience to the whole will of God revealed by Him. For whereas it is added

in the text — “ Which the Son of Man shall give unto you ” — this is an infallible direction whither to apply for our spiritual food, even to Christ and his gospel. He alone is the root and fountain, through whom and by whom we receive all the blessings and benefits we enjoy from God the Father. Without faith in his name, and hope in his promises, without remission of our sins through his merits ; and the guidance and sanctification of that Blessed Spirit which proceedeth from the Father and the Son ; our souls were truly in a languishing condition ; destitute of what alone is able to nourish them here, and satisfy them hereafter.

Upon which account it is that our Lord himself, when conversing with the Jews, calls himself the Bread of Life. They had alledged the great obligation they were under of adhering to Moses,

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in that he had given attestation to the divinity of his mission, by miraculously feeding their forefathers with manna in the desert: —“ He therefore answered and said unto them, I am the Bread of Life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” And again, —“ I am the Bread of Life ; your Fathers did eat Manna in the Wilderness, and are dead : This is the Bread which came down from Heaven ; that a man may eat thereof, and not die : I am the living Bread, which cometh down from Heaven ; if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever. And the Bread that I will give is my Flesh, which I will give for the Life of the World. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his Blood, *i. e.* that spiritual food which I came to administer, ye have no Life in you.”

Seeing then how properly and significantly we are exhorted by our Blessed Saviour to labour after divine instruction, under the notion of meat which endureth unto everlasting life, and which He, the Son of Man, shall give unto us : Herein too we see clearly the importance of the exhortation ; and how indispenfibly obliged we are both in reason and duty to attend to, and comply with it. — Our immortal part, we must allow, is of infinitely greater value than these frail and perishing bodies : How much more concerned therefore ought we to be for the improvement and falvation of them ? And fince our very bodies, we well know, are not to be fupported without labour and trouble ; let us not think it hard to lay out fome portion of our time and care for the good of our fouls ; for the making of our election fure through Chrift Jefus. The hand of the diligent, faith Solomon,
maketh

maketh rich : It is obvious it doth so, with respect to temporal riches. Nor is it to be expected that spiritual blessings, the riches of God's grace and favour, (for which our Lord observes, a kind of holy violence is to be used) should come unsought.

After all — Should any ask, as did the Jews, “ What shall we do that we might work the works of God ? ” let them take their answer from the mouth of Jesus himself in this very chapter — “ This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent ” — that ye believe the divinity of his person and of his doctrine ; putting an entire confidence in the merits of his all-sufficient obedience unto death ; and endeavouring always by an honest, a sober and religious life, to render yourselves worthy to partake of it's benefits.

So may ye rest yourselves satisfied, whatever be the event of your labour in the fight of men, it shall not be in vain in the Lord : Who will give us to drink of the Fountain of living Waters, and feed us secretly with that heavenly Bread, which endureth unto everlasting Life — through Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N XXII.

PROVERBS, xxiii. 23.

Buy the Truth, and sell it not.

THE general attention of mankind to every opportunity of worldly gain, might probably induce the wise man to deliver this his exhortation under the figure of an advantageous bargain; inasmuch as the merchandize of truth is incomparably better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.—In like manner does our Blessed Lord, a greater than Solomon, represent his gospel under the similitude

of a treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.—And again, under that of a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

But though self-interest be indeed a ruling principle in the world, and men are usually cautious enough not to be imposed upon in the ordinary matters of traffick, commutation and contract; yet is it unaccountable how inclined they are to impose upon themselves, in affairs of far greater consequence. Where temporals are at stake, every faculty is attentive: Where the interests of the inward man are concerned, the heart itself is deceitful. Some there be who, having never been apprized of the extreme moment

ment of religious truths, entertain an absolute indifferency concerning them ; and living under an indolent suspension of judgment and faith, bid nothing for the purchase. — Others there are, who undervalue, who even vilify, these sacred principles, because incompatible with their worldly interests and irregular enjoyments. — And, it is to be feared, there are but too many, who, having had grace sufficient to buy the truth, are yet improvident enough to barter so heavenly a treasure for secular considerations.

With a view therefore to each of these, I shall,

First, Consider the Nature and Value of that Truth, which we are here exhorted to *buy* :

Shall then propose the necessary Conditions of the *Purchase* ; and,

Lastly,

Lastly, Shall explain and enforce the Caution annexed, "*Sell it not.*"

First then — By Truth in the text, we are to understand the principles of Morality and sound Religion; according to which, as by an unerring rule, we are to square and direct our conduct: It being the usage of this inspired penman, to recommend these leading principles, under the general denominations of wisdom and truth. Not that the acquisition of human science can be supposed to have been disregarded by Him, who was so well acquainted with it's worth and efficacy; and whose proverbial writings evidently contain a system of political ordinances, for the government of families, cities, and kingdoms; as well as of moral directions, for the behaviour of particular persons. The knowledge of truth, as respecting some useful art, occupation, or profession, is absolutely necessary to
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be procured by far the greatest part of the people. And such as are placed in the more advantageous stations of life must surely find their account likewise in having their minds cultivated by a liberal and learned education. But however requisite these qualifications may be to the purposes of the present life, they are yet far inferior to the attainment of true Religion: Forasmuch as the present life itself, with all it's transient appearances, is but preparatory to a better and eternal state of things. It is folly to think of this material world, as of that alone with which we are concerned; and consequently of the good things thereof, as alone deserving our esteem and foresight. There is another world, a world of spirits, with which we are all intimately connected, and to which we are hastening; and every other consideration is in all reason to be made subservient to the one great end

end of man, the salvation of his immortal part, his soul.

But perhaps some may be apt to ask, (as did the Roman Governor) what is Truth?—Amidst the multitude of pretenders to true Religion, where is it to be found?—And, it must be confessed, many have been the inventions of men, with respect to divine faith and worship in all ages: Not only in the times of heathen darkness and superstition, but even under the glorious light of the gospel. Of this however we are certain, viz. that the Word of God is Truth; and our reason properly applied is abundantly sufficient to distinguish it. There is no fair trial but the Holy Scriptures will abide; no reasonable assurance which they will not administer. The evidence of miracles and prophecies from without, the evidence of purity and holiness from within, give undeniable testimony to
their

their divine Original. And from these sacred oracles alone it is, those fountains of light and truth, that we can derive any just notices of ourselves, and of the relation we bear to our God.—In these are manifested the original dignity of man; the corruption and impotence of his fallen state; the love of God towards him in reconciling the world to himself by his Son; the nature and end of his present being; and the life and immortality that await him through the gates of death. In these too is expressly delineated every instance of moral duty, dependant on the love of God, and that of our Neighbour.—The very design of our Blessed Lord's incarnation (as he himself declared in the presence of Pilate) was to bear witness to the truth: To dispel that cloud of ignorance and delusion, which the spiritual Enemy of mankind had spread over the whole earth; and to supply the uncertain systems of
human

human conjecture, by a full and perfect revelation of the divine will.

Hither then are we to apply for that spiritual peace, which passeth all understanding ; for that infallible direction, which will guide us into all truth. —

“ Thy word (said the Psalmist) is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.” And though neither David nor Solomon had so clear an insight into the whole of God’s will, and man’s happiness, as we are blest with under the gospel dispensation ; yet may their pious sentiments and precepts be fairly construed in a Christian sense, and receive additional enforcements from the present state of things. If the laws of Nature and of Moses were a light, how much more radiant the law of Christ ? And if the truth in them contained was to be known and observed, or (in the language of the text) to be *purchased* at any rate ;
how

how inestimable the truth of the gospel? This is indeed that heavenly truth which enlightens and enlarges the understanding, rectifies the affections, and makes men free — free from the slavery of sin and error, from the anxious disquietudes of this life, and the fearful apprehensions of another. To be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of vain doctrine, is doubtless a state of insecurity and distraction. But true Religion is an anchor to the soul, both sure and stedfast; keeping it steady amidst the storms of a tempestuous world; till in due time it arrive at the haven where it would be.

Such is the excellence of that Truth we are considering; and which therefore we are exhorted to *buy*. — Under which expression is intimated, that so valuable an acquisition as that of a right disciplined mind, a sound faith, and a
 well

well grounded hope, is not to be obtained without a *price*, without some degree of cost on our parts : And that, since we are watching every opportunity of worldly advantage, we should spare no *expence* to be possessed of this ornament and security of the soul, which is more precious than rubies, and all the things we can desire are not to be compared unto it.—I proceed therefore in the next place to propose the necessary conditions of this *Purchase*, or what is required of those who would come to the knowledge of the Truth.

2. There is certainly implanted in the very nature of man a desire of knowledge, and a love of truth ; and the real cause why so many take up with false notions of things, and deviate both in judgment and practice, cannot be any original enmity to truth as such, but that they care not to be at the *expence* of
coming

coming at it. Either they will not *pay* it the attention it *demand*s, or they will not *lay down* for it their prejudices, or their passions. But,

I. First of all, without attention there can be no perfect knowledge. For though truth be congenial with the human soul, as light is with the eye; yet unless we determine as well our ideas as our views to some certain object, we shall no more think than see to any good purpose. This is confessedly so with respect to mechanical arts, and the common business of the world; ignorance and error are inseparable from a dissipated mind. Nor can it hold less true in regard to matters of Religion; which however require more of our attention, but where we are least of all inclined to bestow it. Our spirits, naturally averse to recollection, are ever pleased with roving from one object to another; and

above all things evade any settled communication with immaterial and invisible subjects. Hence it is that the divine nature and attributes, the moral government of the universe, the interests of the human soul, the final judgment, the eternal state of rewards and punishments, those momentous points, have but a weak influence on the manners of men, because so imperfectly believed : And whence this defect of belief in them, but because they are so little attended to and considered ?

Besides, it is reasonable to suppose that our spiritual Adversary, well knowing the importance of religious contemplation to strengthen faith, and the efficacy of faith to shake his kingdom, founded only upon distraction and inadvertency, is particularly vigilant to divert men from the study of the truth by innumerable temptations : Hurrying
them

them through uninterrupted scenes of vanity, into a forgetfulness of the one thing needful.

Whosoever therefore is in good earnest a disciple of truth, willing to know God and his duty, what he is to believe and what to practise, let him in the first place pay it that deference of attention, and application of spirit, which it so justly deserves.

2. The next thing mentioned, as requisite to the attainment of Truth, was, to submit our prejudices to it's dictates.

I have before observed that men are desirous of knowledge, but averse to the pains of investigating it. Now prejudice, or the entertaining a hasty and unadvised judgment of things, is the effect of these two dispositions : The former of which is hereby gratified in an imaginary pos-

feſſion of truth ; and the latter, in a
 conceit of being poſſeſſed of it without
 the fatigue of thinking. But in reality
 there is not a greater enemy to the
 knowledge of the truth than prejudice ;
 ſeeing it ſhuts up beforehand thoſe very
 avenues, by which truth ſhould find
 admittance to the mind. “ Seeſt thou a
 man wiſe in his own conceit ? there is
 more hope of a fool than of him.” And
 it will ever be found in fact an eaſier
 taſk to inſtil knowledge of any kind into
 the moſt ignorant and illiterate perſon,
 if he be but honeſt and attentive, than
 to drain off erroneous conceits, thoſe
 evil humours of the mind, from one
 opinionatively learned. A heart ready
 to ſubmit every notion, how flattering
 ſoever, to the touchſtone of Reaſon, and
 the teſtimony of Revelation, is that good
 ground upon which the ſeed ſown brings
 forth abundantly.

Let

Let me add too, that this poison of prejudice requires the more powerful antidote, because usually imbibed in tender years ; and therefore oftentimes found operating in certain instances upon minds otherwise well disposed. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" was the reflection of an Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile. And who but sees daily the malicious effects of unadvised and intemperate zeal, from men in other respects valuable and Christian?

If then we would make any progress in the investigation and attainment of truth, it is moreover indispensably necessary that we come to it without partiality and prejudice.

(2). The last condition proposed was, the sacrificing our Passions to the Truth.

"The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life," *i. e.* Sensuality,

avarice, and ambition, are plainly the engines of Satan ; by which he turns the world upside down, representing things under false colours and appearances ; and so cheating mankind into a life of fancy and imagination, more than of judgment and truth. — For when the mind, the fountain, is vitiated, the whole stream of thinking must needs be corrupt.

What other reason can be given, why the same person, at different times, and under different circumstances, (for instance, when the desire languisheth, and his dissolution draweth nigh) sees the follies and vanities of the present life in quite another light than what he had ever viewed them in before ? repents himself that he was deceived by them, and cautions others against their insinuations ? Is it that the things themselves have changed their nature ? Is it not rather

rather that he was then led by Appetite, but now by Reason?

Men subject to the passions do not care for opening their eyes to such truths as condemn and threaten their profitable or pleasurable pursuits ; and thence are apt to frame to themselves a Religion suitable to their own taste and morals : Robbing God of certain of his attributes, invalidating the precepts, and disarming the terrors of the gospel. Thus the infidel and dissolute pretend to have argument on their side, whilst they cry out, saying, — “ Tush, the Lord doth not see, neither doth the God of Jacob regard ” — “ Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.”

Would we then shew ourselves men—would we approve ourselves reasonable and free Beings? Above all things it behoves us to lay aside every *weight*, every

criminal adherence and infatuating passion; that by so doing we may see clearly, judge properly, and act wisely.

Having thus far considered the nature and value of that Truth we are exhorted to buy, as also the necessary conditions of the purchase; come we now, in the last place, briefly to explain and enforce the caution annexed—given too under a like figurative allusion—“Sell it not.”

3. For indeed to *sell the Truth*, what is it but, in other words, to barter our Reason and our Religion, those permanent graces of the soul, for the emoluments of a transitory life? Which, though, it must be owned, the too common rewards of an iniquitous world to so base a conduct, do yet make but an unhappy amends for the certain displeasure of the God of Truth, the contempt of every

every good man, and the torments of a guilty conscience.

It were endless to go about to unravel the whole mystery of falshood, by which, in the common mart of human life, the dictates of Reason are eluded, the Will of God suppressed, and his Commandments broken. Let it suffice to remark in general, that whosoever indulges himself in criminal pleasures, or unjust acquisitions, does virtually deny Christ and his gospel. And if any one presumes to sacrifice the tenets of that most holy faith, which was once delivered to the Saints, either to the vanity of his own unstable heart, or to any gainful compliance with an infidel and licentious age, the same may be fairly said to be a *Seller* of the Truth; and must assuredly answer for so wretched a commerce, before his tribunal, who hath sufficiently forewarned his followers in that most solemn

solemn question—"What shall a man be profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

It is beyond all doubt that the present life is only a probationary state in order to a better: And the means of obtaining his favour, which the divine Providence hath put into our hands, are many and inestimable. God hath not only sent his Son into the world with the most amazing signs and wonders to give testimony to the truth, and by a most exemplary life of virtue and holiness to teach us the way to Heaven, which by his precious death He hath opened to every sincere believer; but hath also given us his written word, to be a light unto our paths during our pilgrimage through this vale of darkness. This is open to every enquirer; here, in the language of the Prophet, may we buy the truth without money and without price. So
that

that we are equally to blame if we do not know, and if we do not adhere to it. There is no excuse for ignorance in religious matters, where it is wilful; much less can there be any for presumptuous wickedness against knowledge. To disguise, suppress, or betray the sacred deposit of our belief, whether by word or deed, through fear or love of the world, is to do despight to the Spirit of Grace, and to render ourselves obnoxious to the greater condemnation. "Better were it not to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us."

The conclusion then is, that we buy the truth at any rate; that we grudge no application, no self-denial, to adorn and improve the reasoning faculty, with good discipline, useful learning, and true religion.

religion. For, as the light of the body is the eye, so is truth the "candle of the Lord" in the soul of man. The former we have in common with irrational animals; and by it are enabled to pursue the necessary occupations of a life subject to the senses. But by virtue of the inward lamp well prepared and trimmed, our views are extended beyond the confines of matter; we come to the knowledge of ourselves by it's reflected influence; look into the world of spirits; see the Almighty present in every place; discern his will, and therein our happiness.

Let me only remind those, who, by the grace of God, and their own honest enquiries, have once happily arrived to the truth as it is in Christ; that they give all diligence to make it the standard of their belief, and the guide of their actions. Neither suffering any
vain

vain conceit to cloud the understanding,
 nor any base affection to deprave the
 will. For, "if the light that is in us
 be darkness, how great is that darkness!"
 If we follow not the dictates of Reason,
 rectified and enlightened by divine Re-
 velation; what is to be expected but
 ignorance and delusion, the necessary
 forerunners of sin and sorrow?

S E R M O N XXIII.

PSALM xix. 12.

*Who can understand his Errors ? Cleanse
Thou me from secret Faults !*

THERE is scarce any subject of rational enquiry, which the generality of men are less inclined to investigate, or in the investigating of which they are more liable to mistake, than the true state of their own moral character. A conscious assurance of being free from flagrant and presumptuous wickedness, is apt to lead them into a dangerous security, and to cause them to think more
highly

highly of themselves than they ought to think ; nay perhaps sometimes, like the insolent Pharisee, even to thank God in their hearts that they are not as other men are. In the mean while they rest themselves satisfied with their present spiritual attainments ; without any the least endeavours toward furthering and improving their souls in grace and virtue. The wrong bias of their affections, the frowardness of their tempers, their numberless deviations from the rules of prudence and the laws of charity, together with the manifold imperfections of their best services, are, in such a situation of mind, little regarded, much less corrected. Whereas the main business of this probationary life is both to watch the inward man, and also to pay a due and constant respect to every circumstance of outward deportment ; lest an habitual inattention to smaller defects deprave the manners and spoil the Christian.

tian. Nor should we ever fail humbly to acknowledge, and earnestly to beg pardon of God for, those manifold offences, which elude our care, and even escape our observation ; after the example of the pious Psalmist in my text, saying,—“ Who, O Lord, can understand his Errors ? Cleanse Thou me from secret Faults !”

To represent to you, first, the nature and quality of those errors and secret faults, from which it so highly concerns us to be cleansed—And then to offer a few such useful reflections as properly arise from the subject, shall be the business of the following discourse.

I. Now the errors pointed at by the inspired writer of this psalm, are without doubt those slips and failings, to which we give in general the favourable name of sins of infirmity, *i. e.* such sins

as

as are much rather to be imputed to the weakness of our nature, than to the malice of our wills; and which have indeed no more of wilfulness in them, than what is just necessary to denominate them sins. For that by errors was here meant sins in an inferior degree, is plain from his praying to be cleansed from them, under the character of faults—secret faults, as they are deservedly called, both because they are committed unawares, through inadvertency, surprize, or some sudden passion; and because too they are usually forgot almost as soon as they are committed.

But the better to state the true notion of these, and withal to distinguish them from such crimes as are accompanied with a greater degree of malignity, I shall take occasion to specify them in certain instances.

1. Now that wherein we are most liable to err, and to which through the frailty of our nature we are most unequal, is beyond all question the government of our thoughts. — The very best men cannot but be sensible how frequently they are overtaken in a fault from the first motions of their own hearts. Nay who is there but offends daily in this respect? For among these are to be reckoned all those sudden gusts of the passions, which anticipate reason, and prevent all manner of deliberation. Such was that surprizing, and as it were instantaneous *timidity* of Peter, by which he was driven to deny his Lord; whom he had just before too endeavoured to defend with a blameable *impetuosity*. — Such was the hasty *anger* of Paul, when he unwittingly reviled the High Priest. Such was the *transport* of the Apostles, of whom it is said, “They believed not for joy,” when Jesus himself stood in the midst

midst of them, after that he was risen from the dead. — Of this sort too seems to have been the precipitate *despair* of the Keeper of the Prison in the Acts; who upon awaking out of sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, drew out his sword and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

But besides these and the like intemperate effects of sudden passion and surprise, what man has not cause to complain of the many impure, uncharitable, and irreligious ideas, which obtrude themselves upon the mind whether he will or no, even to the reluctance and pain of every good person?

It is too notorious to every one's self, that his most solemn services are not altogether free from these impious intruders. Unhallowed images, like so many dead flies, corrupt the offering. How

apt is the idolatrous imagination, when we are conversing with spiritual objects, and particularly in prayer, to draw the Deity with certain features and lineaments, instead of directing itself by his glorious and essential attributes, whereby alone it is given unto us to know Him? And when the attention is fixed in the best manner we are able, how easy, how insensible the deviations from the important business we are so much concerned to pursue? How quick the transitions from heavenly to earthly subjects, from eternal to temporal matters, from the word of God to the ways of Men?

Thus prone are we to error through the influence of our thoughts. — But seeing every fault rises in degree, in proportion to the concern the will has in it; and since the first emotions of the passions, the first risings of the imagination, are very little, if at all, in our own
power;

power ; therefore the infirmities I have been mentioning are doubtless excuseable in the eye of Divine Mercy, if instantly and resolutely checked ; And will then only be charged to our account, if we suffer them to stay upon our minds, acquiesce in, or encourage them. In which case they are no longer to be deemed sins of human frailty, though they did originally spring from thence, but are justly denominated, and shall be judged, wilful.

2. The next point wherein we are subject to frequent failures through the infirmity of our nature, is the management of our speech.—Which, though it may seem to be the effect of thought, and for that reason to be more criminal when misapplied, as having more of wilfulness in it ; yet, if we recollect how apt men are to speak before they think, as likewise the extreme difficulty of

taking such strict heed that we offend not with the tongue, we shall be inclined to impute rash words in some cases, as well as evil thoughts, to the weakness and imperfection of man's nature. — When Peter denied his Lord, it is plain he considered not what he was doing ; for the text informs us, when he afterwards thought thereon he wept bitterly. And it may be said without reserve, there is no one so cautious and circumspect, but that his words do oftentimes prevent his thought. Even Moses, the meekest man upon earth, is represented to have spoken unadvisedly with his lips. The like we have observed of Paul when before the High Priest. Nor is it to be questioned but David himself had an eye to his verbal no less than mental transgressions, when he prayed to be cleansed from secret faults.

These then have a like pretension to
the

the favour and pardon of God.—But in the number of these let no one presume to reckon such profane words, oaths, imprecations, or lies, as, through a long neglected habit, are become so familiar to the speaker, that, however shocking to the ears of others, they may probably escape his lips without thought or notice. Such, we may be assured, are not only criminal, but have an uncommon deal of malignity in them, arising from the inveterate root they have been permitted to take: And, though they are not without difficulty to be eradicated, yet must this be done as we value our salvation.—So, with respect to angry and passionate speeches; it is true, a few hasty expressions are usually and charitably attributed to the infirmity of particular tempers: But words of malice, rancour, and premeditated ill-will, come under a very different consideration.—

“ Whosoever shall say unto his brother,

L 4

Racha,

Racha, *i. e.* call him worthless fellow, shall be in danger of the council, of being punished by human judicature: But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, *i. e.* shall suffer his passion to break out into more virulent railing, shall be in danger of hell-fire."

3. There is yet another species of errors, or undesigned faults, in excuse of which the frailty of human nature pleads loudly for us: And this more properly respects our active deportment; including as well certain neglects of duty, as real trespasses. — It must be owned in many things we offend all, omitting what we ought to do, and doing what we ought not. The duties resulting from the several relations we bear to God, our Neighbour, and our Selves, are so many and various, that even to distinguish them with that accuracy and precision as to give all their
due,

due, and fulfil every obligation in the minutest points, and most intricate circumstances, requires a knowledge exceeding that of the subtlest Casuist. — How then shall we not be guilty of omissions in numberless instances? For though the word of God directs men to their duty in general under every relation; yet so much is necessarily left to the judgment and conscience of each person in particular cases, that it can hardly be conceived but amidst the incumbrances of worldly affairs, either through forgetfulness or inadvertency, the most exact and scrupulous must often fail of doing what they ought to have done. And we may therefore presume to expect mercy at God's hand for such pitiable defects.

However, great care is to be taken that we deceive not ourselves in this article of omission: By imputing such neglects

lects of duty to the account of human infirmity, as are owing to a corrupted heart and will. Whoever withdraws himself from the publick worship of Almighty God, the better to serve his own covetous disposition; or who attends not to the cries of the distressed, the poor and needy, when it is in his power to relieve them; shall infallibly answer for these and the like omissions before the Tribunal of Heaven. God is not mocked; He hath given no man a talent to hide in the earth, no advantages to any but for use and improvement. — Many of our oversights and ignorances He will of his goodness forgive: But all wilful omissions are so many wilful sins, and as such must be accounted for.

Then, as to actual commission, there are too certain trespasses of this sort, which the frailty of man's nature may, after all his precaution, now and then
betray

betray him into. The best men have their unguarded moments, when they are liable to be surprized into actions which in their cooler hours they condemn. And the transition from an innocent to a blameable behaviour is in some cases so very easy, that he who ventures to the extremity of the former, may undesignedly slip into the latter. This consideration however, though it may alleviate a transgression in one instance, should be a lasting caution to every one "who thinketh he standeth, to take heed lest he fall." For that man has but a poor plea in his favour, who falls by a temptation upon which he intrudes himself. And indeed it must be said in general, there are but few actual sins, but have too much of wilfulness in them to plead infirmity for their excuse. Shall the drunkard say, "I intended not a debauch?" or the adulterer, "I was surprized into guilt?" Shall the
c covetous

covetous oppressor be excused in regard to his insatiable appetite? or the blood-thirsty persecutor because of his blind zeal?—Without doubt there are many slight offences which persons of good dispositions inadvertently commit; and were God extreme to mark what is done amiss, who might stand? But to the commission of sins of any magnitude there must needs be some previous deliberation, some criminal process: They are prepared in the head and heart, before they are put in execution. Such therefore cannot reasonably pretend to any alleviation of guilt, upon account of the weakness of man's nature, which proceed from the full consent of his depraved will.

Having thus far represented the nature and circumstances of those Errors and secret Faults alluded to in the text; I shall add only a few such useful

ful Reflections as result from what has been delivered.

II. And here—A due sense of that propensity to error and wickedness, derived upon our nature from the fall of our first parents, and of which we cannot but be intimately conscious, should teach us in the first place humility of spirit. For what claim to merit can any Son of Adam pretend to? Who being originally born under evident circumstances of weakness, is therefore encompassed with so great infirmities, that he can scarce help falling seven times a day. So little reason have the best of mankind to think highly of themselves, above what they ought to think; but enough to think soberly, as the Apostle exhorts. Spiritual pride, above all other, is not for man: Much more suitable to his condition is it, to lament with the Psalmist, “ Who can understand his errors? Who can tell
how

how oft he offendeth?"— For how regardless soever we may in general be of those little slips and miscarriages, to which by the frailty of our very constitution, as fallen and degenerate creatures, we are perpetually subject; yet should it be remembered that all even the least of these have in them the nature of sin, and are therefore odious in God's sight; who, we are told in another psalm, sets our iniquities before Him, and our *secret sins* in the light of his countenance. Consequently they demand both our humble confession and unfeigned repentance; together with the best endeavours we can possibly exert to stand clear of them. — To which good purpose it principally behoves us to keep the heart with all diligence, to observe and regulate it's earliest motions and tendencies; because hence are the issues of life. It is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh: And the
tincture

tincture of this grand fountain it is that gives a colour to all our actions.

But neither is it sufficient that we watch our infirmities, our froward tempers, and evil dispositions, though with a prying eye, as having the bias of nature, if not the facility of habit, always on their side, and therefore but too apt to elude our most cautious circumspection : It is moreover necessary that we pray against them ; that we make it the constant subject of our petitions at the throne of grace, as to be cleansed from secret faults, faults of daily incurſion ; ſo likewise to be preserved, as far as may be in the present ſtate, from the commiſſion of them : Through the gracious influence and fellowſhip of the Holy Ghoſt ; ever ready to be imparted to the prayers of the faithful.

And,

And, lastly, since it has pleased our heavenly Father, of his infinite mercy, to provide us with a certain propitiation, in the person of his only begotten Son, who died upon the cross for all kinds and degrees of sin repented of and forsaken ; let us ever be looking up unto Him, with the most devout acknowledgments of faith and obedience ; of whose merits and mediation alone it is, that we can be justified in the sight of God.

SERMON

SERMON XXIV.

JEREMIAH, ix. 23, 24.

Thus saith the Lord — Let not the wise Man glory in his Wisdom, neither let the mighty Man glory in his Might, let not the rich Man glory in his Riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord.

WE have here delivered by the Prophet, in the name of the Lord, an express caution against priding ourselves, and placing our security, in any superiority of endowments, whether

of mind, of body, or of fortune; which in the present state particular persons must have over the generality; and through which therefore they are apt to be puffed up into a self-sufficiency and a forgetfulness of God. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches." Which caution is made introductory to an exhortation in the following verse, wherein to put our confidence, and to make our boast, viz. in Religion only. "But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord."

But though men justly stand corrected for perverting their abilities of any kind into an occasion of arrogance and impiety; yet is it not to be inferred hence, that wisdom and judgment, health and strength, riches and honours, are of little

or no estimation ; or that such advantages do not justify our taking pleasure and rejoicing in them, with humility and thankfulness : Seeing they are certainly the gifts of Providence to excellent purposes ; and, if rightly employed, are great blessings not only to those who possess them, but to others also who are within the reach of their influence.

“ The lips of the wise (saith Solomon) disperse knowledge.” It is from this fountain, from the instructions and admonitions of men of understanding, that is derived what is found necessary to the accommodation and defence of civil life, and to the maintenance of virtue and religion in the world. It must too be granted, if so dependant a creature as man had reason to glory in any accomplishment, it might be in his wisdom : Because this is an excellency of a real and permanent nature ; and the most

significant distinction betwixt men is, that the reasonable soul, that "candle of the Lord," shines with a greater degree of lustre in some than in others.

And as wisdom is the perfection of the inward man, so is might or strength of the outward; by virtue whereof the body is rendered effectual to execute the designs and directions of the mind, throughout the various occupations of human life. It is by the hand of the strong, and the arm of the mighty, that the weak and impotent are supported and defended. And these are the instruments which God himself makes use of, in many extraordinary instances, to bring about the determinations of his all-disposing will.

The like is to be said of wealth and honour; that these in the hands of a few are providentially intended for the general

general good. The great law of order, which is the law of Heaven, requires different degrees amongst men : And therefore the many poor, that must always be in the world, are never failing subjects whereon to exercise the charity and beneficence of the rich. A proper discharge of which duty is a certain provision for a more enduring substance in the mansions of eternity.

It is plain then that the design of the text is by no means to disparage things in themselves good, and appointed to good ends. And such unhappy zealots, who, from mistaken notions of the divine will, either despise all human learning, use unnecessary mortifications, or make vows of poverty, will surely have little pretension to merit, when it shall be asked them at the great day of accounts, " Who required this at your hands ?" but will rather stand obnoxious

to the displeasure of their Creator, for having frustrated the intentions of his Providence, by rendering those useful faculties He had endowed them with, of no effect through their superstition and folly.

What is properly to be deduced from the admonition before us is—that it is vanity and presumption in any man, so to value himself upon the best temporal gifts, as to place an insolent sufficiency in them; without respecting either God the author, or the benefit of mankind, the end for which they were given.—Which general inference a little attention to the particulars here specified will readily illustrate.

I. For, in the first place, as to wisdom itself, though the peculiar excellence of a spirit, what is there even in this that can justify such glorying? Man is dependant

dependant on his Maker not only for his being, but in like manner for every qualification of mind as well as body that accompanies and adorns it. Who-soever hath wisdom it is the gift of God. If then he did receive it, why should he glory as though he had not received it? The same power that gave, can at pleasure, disappoint, obstruct, or take it quite away. Some small unforeseen accident often disconcerts the best laid scheme; bodily infirmities have malignity enough to craze the most accurate judgment; and it is no uncommon thing for men of the brightest parts and most refined understandings to outlive their very reason.

What too, may it be asked, is the nature and quality of that wisdom, which men are so apt to pride themselves in? Is it the attainment of worldly policy, whereby to deceive and over-reach their

fellow creatures — to raise a fortune upon the ruin of others — to gratify the resentments of malice by dissingenuity and falsehood? — Is it to cast off all fear of God, all sense of Religion, all restraint of Conscience; as proper only to keep the ignorant in awe? and in the mean while to give a loose to criminal pleasures, and indulge every vicious appetite without check or remorse? But this wisdom, in the words of an Apostle, is earthly, sensual, devilish; and for any to glory in it is preposterously to glory in their shame. — Or does a man's confidence and self-sufficiency arise from his knowledge of languages and letters, his comprehension of arts and sciences? It cannot be denied that such literary advantages are exceedingly honourable and useful in the world. But no sooner is he elated thereby into a proud disdain of, and a supercilious tyranny over the capacities of other men, than they lose
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much of their value and power of doing good: Nay, when thus debased, have been oftentimes productive of the most pernicious consequences civil and religious.

2. Again—If it be a vain thing for a man to glory in his intellectual abilities, as the wisest of men hath assured us, and the Prophet in my text plainly intimates, and reason and experience confirm their testimony; a much greater presumption is it for him to glory in his bodily constitution, however sound and healthful. Since every one must see how liable this brittle frame is to be shocked and demolished by a thousand accidents. It is indeed from the impulse of nature necessarily tending to it's own decay, and final dissolution into that dust of the earth, out of which it was originally taken, and to which it is doomed to return. A reflection surely mortifying enough to subdue the pride of man, arising from
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any accomplishments of his external person, seeing in this respect he is so nearly related to corruption, that vanity itself can neither deny nor dispute the alliance.

The life too, or animal spirit, which supports and invigorates this frame, is in the language of scripture termed a vapour: "What is your life? (said St. James to certain inconsiderate boasters in his days) it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away." Now, what security is to be placed in a power so perishing as the arm of flesh, in a spirit so transient as the breath of life?

Add withal, that the strength of any human body is at best but comparatively great. One man is stronger than another, and there is a stronger than him: Even the beasts of the field are in this regard mightier than the mightiest of
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the sons of men. So that, exclusive of that almighty power, which is able to crush the most prevailing tyrant, such an one is always liable to be overcome even at his own weapons, and consequently can have no reason to glory in his might.

3. Lastly—Full as little cause has the rich man to glory in his riches : Seeing these are mere externals, which do not necessarily belong to the man ; neither if he hath them is he, strictly speaking, the better ; neither if he hath them not is he the worse ; forasmuch as they are possessed of no inherent quality, no natural virtue, either to improve the mind, or preserve the body. Their only advantage lies in the use that is made of them, being good instruments if honestly acquired, and properly applied : But if ill-gotten or ill-used, so far are they from being a ground of confidence,
that

that they are as *thorns to the eyes*, and a terror to the conscience.

From these cursory remarks on the several instances of false glorying, specified and forbidden in the text, (of themselves indeed sufficiently obvious, though perhaps seldom attended to in the manner they deserve) I proceed to consider the only justifiable occasion of man's glorying, unto which too he is exhorted in the following words —
 “ But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord.”

2. Where, by understanding and knowing God, is meant, the having our minds well informed, and our souls impressed, with a religious knowledge and operative sense of his Being and Attributes, so far as He has made Himself knowable

knowable by us ; either by the dictates of Reason, or the light of Scripture.

This is a sure foundation of present peace and future happiness ; wherein the unlearned, impotent, and poor may make their boast, and they shall not be confounded. — Religion is in truth the peculiar glory of a man ; what distinguishes him from other animals, and from which arises all the real satisfaction he is capable of enjoying in any state and circumstances of his being. A rational spirit can be happy in God alone, the source of all goodness, the centre of all perfection. Whom though we now see but as through a glass darkly ; the nearest approaches we can make toward his incomprehensible majesty, being at an awful distance, and under the veil of flesh ; yet from a practical observance of his laws, an humble acquiescence under all the dispensations of his providence here,

here, and an entire reliance on his promises for futurity, we may arrive at such a degree of communion with the divine Spirit even in this life, as shall give peace to the soul; a grateful earnest of that blessed communion with the same Spirit in the life to come, when Faith shall be swallowed up of sight, and Hope lost in possession.

Here however it may be proper to observe—that there is such a thing as a false glorying even from a religious persuasion. It is not all Religion that is the knowledge of God. Men may entertain unworthy notions of the Deity; may mistake the fopperies of superstition for spiritual service, and a persecuting spirit for zeal according to the gospel; may even misapprehend the frenzy of enthusiasm for divine illuminations. It therefore behoves us to try the spirits and doctrines of men, whether they be
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of God, before we give place to suggestions of so pernicious a tendency.—The spirit of true Religion is rational, meek, and orderly. The rejoicings of good Christians are no proud boastings; but the inward and silent testimony of their consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, they have had their conversation in the world.

To return then, and conclude—It is undoubtedly our excellence, our everlasting interest, to acquaint ourselves with God, and to walk before Him, as unto whom we must give an account. All other advantages, how eminent soever, unless sanctified by religious principles and moral righteousness, are, comparatively speaking, of no consideration. The present world itself with all its glories is but a transitory scene that soon passeth away; and can afford no solid satisfaction but in the consciousness of doing

doing well, and in the hopes of a better life. Herein consists the triumph of the Christian, that he can look beyond the grave, and hath a prospect of happiness through the gates of death: A happiness that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven, for as many as stedfastly believe the doctrines, and conscientiously obey the precepts of the gospel.—This, in a word, is to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent; and in the knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life.

S E R M O N XXV.

LUKE, xi. 28.

*But He said, yea, rather blessed are they that
hear the Word of God, and keep it.*

JESUS (saith the Evangelist) was casting out a devil, and it was dumb: And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. The generality, whose minds were free, and their judgments unprejudiced, were readily struck with so amazing and effectual an operation; and, if left to themselves, would without doubt have attributed this mighty

cure to that Divine Power, from whence it really proceeded. But some (*i. e.* the Pharisees, as St. Matthew informs us) whose private interests, passions, and prejudices rendered them insensible both to the doctrine and miracles of our Lord, with the utmost perverseness said, "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils:" Chusing rather to attribute a work, which they could not but acknowledge to be *above* the efficacy of nature and art, to the influence of an evil Spirit, than to confess the Spirit of God, in an instance the most demonstrative of his power and goodness.

Upon this our Saviour condescended, chiefly (as we may suppose) for the sake of the multitude, who were in such danger of being misled by their false Teachers; to refute their impious calumny, by exposing the absurdity of it: Observing to them how unlikely it was that

Satan

Satan should cast out Satan ; which would be the dividing his kingdom, and consequently the destroying it. Whereas, by his casting him out He plainly shewed, that He was armed with a power, superior to what the Devil is possessed with ; and that could be none other than the Finger of God.

And now it was that a certain woman of the company, satisfied of the justness of his reasoning, lift up her voice and said unto him, “ Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked :” To which our Lord took occasion to make answer as in the text, “ Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.” Which as it was a severe reproof in regard to those unbelieving Masters of Israel, with whom He had been then arguing, and who attended to him only that they might cavil at his doctrine : So is it to

us likewise of universal significance; as it sets before us the exceeding value and power of that Divine Revelation, which entitles the observers of it to a blessedness superior to every other consideration.

The farther use I would make of this remarkable saying of our Lord and Saviour, is, —

First, To offer some considerations touching the Authority of *that Word* which is here so forcibly recommended to our attention. —
From whence,

Secondly, will appear the peculiar Blessedness derived upon those who hear this Word and keep it.

1. Now the Authority of the Word here recommended consists primarily in this, that it is the Word, not of fallible
Men,

S E R M O N XXV. 181

Men, but, of God ; who can neither be deceived himself, nor deceive us : Consequently what He speaks must be true ; and the Truths declared by Him most worthy our observation, and indispensably requiring it.—It remains only to be considered —upon what testimony we may be assured that the word spoken is indeed the Word of God ; a Revelation of his Will, and therefore the Rule of our Faith : And, whether the testimony in favour of the Gospel Revelation is sufficient to ascertain it's divine Authority.

It were needless to insist on the personal conviction of any Prophet or inspired Teacher, that He is himself really under a divine influence ; because, the revelations made to him being for the use of others, he must be first enabled by some infallible proof to satisfy those whom it may concern to receive him, that he was in truth sent from God.

Only thus much I observe, it must needs argue extreme folly and presumption to imagine that that Almighty Being who made the human mind, and gave us a faculty of communicating our thoughts to each other by means of certain bodily organs, should not himself be able to communicate his will to man, in some way at least as clear as indisputable, as at different times, and on different occasions may best answer the ends of his Providence.

Taking it for granted therefore, that God can reveal his will to *any* person in such a manner, and with such irresistible evidence, as to produce an absolute certainty in the mind of *that* person that the revelation is *from* Him : The question is, what reasonable grounds of assurance can be given, by One thus immediately commissioned from Heaven, to induce, or rather oblige, others to
accept

accept of, and submit to, his authority as divine? Since, how plausible soever his pretensions may be, certain proofs and evidences are requisite in this case, in order to secure men from the whims and fictions of enthusiasts and impostors.

Now, besides the internal evidence arising from the nature of the message or doctrine itself, that it is altogether worthy of God to deliver, and Man to receive; some external marks and tokens are further necessary; such as may satisfy the senses of every unprejudiced person, and demonstrate the Author of them to be endued with power from on high. Of this kind are miracles, extraordinary and wonderful operations, not reducible to any natural causes; far surpassing the utmost efforts of men though assisted by the artifice of devils; in their tendency subversive of every thing that is evil, and serving only to promote the honour

of God, and the good of mankind.—Add to these prophetic predictions of things distant, contingent, improbable, marvellous, punctually verified in the event.

And as such proofs cannot but be demonstrative of the truth of the Revelation they are brought to attest, with all those who are eye-witnesses of the facts; provided their minds lie open to conviction: So are they no less capable of giving sufficient assurance to succeeding generations, when fully and faithfully transmitted to them. For surely revealed truths, together with the miracles wrought in confirmation of them, may be delivered down to latest posterity with the same certainty as any other truths or facts whatsoever: And if the tradition itself be so circumstanced as to give all reasonable, all possible, assurance that such extraordinary works were really performed in attestation of such excellent

lent doctrines ; no argument can be offered against the credibility of them, but what must necessarily invalidate all human testimony, which is absurd ; and require fresh miracles in every age and country, for the satisfaction of every scrupulous person, which were a dishonouring God, and would in time too destroy the very force and efficacy of miracles themselves.

To apply then these particulars to the evidences we are actually possessed of in favour of the Gospel Revelation.

That Jesus the author and finisher of our faith was the Son of God, who came into the world not to do his own will, but the will of the Father which had sent him, was the record he bare of himself : But this we are told the Pharisees disallowed ; and indeed they are his own words, “ If I bear witness of myself, (*i. e.* if

if I declare myself a Prophet without any attestation from God) my witness is not true ;" God never sending any Prophet to men, without sufficient testimony that he was sent from Him. We therefore find our Blessed Lord constantly appealing to the miracles which He wrought, as undeniable credentials of his divine mission, and of the truth and importance of his doctrines. " The works that I do, said He, they bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." And again, " If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not ; but if I do, though you believe not me, the testimony of my words, yet believe the works."

Such indeed was the intrinsic excellency of Christ's doctrine, as might reasonably claim the attention of every considerate person. Well did He stile himself the Light of the World, who so eminently opened the understandings, as
well

well as the eyes, of the blind : The entire tendency of his preaching being to recover men from vice and error, to lead them to the knowledge and love of God, and to direct them by laws the most refined and heavenly. But still, the obligation they were under of embracing his doctrines, and submitting to his laws, how excellent soever, was from the miracles performed in confirmation of them. When they not only heard him speak as never man spake, but saw him also do the works which never man did, they were utterly inexcusable in not honouring his person, and receiving his message ; a message too so worthy of all acceptation. To raise the dead to life again, give sight to one blind from his birth, cure all manner of sickness and disease amongst the people at a word's speaking, cast out devils, and the like, were operations evidently of a supernatural kind ; and must therefore be derived
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from a Being more than human : But not from Evil Spirits ; because, how great soever their power may be supposed to be, it is equally absurd to imagine that they would exert it in attestation of doctrines absolutely irreconcilable with their impious purposes ; and that God, infinitely just and good, should suffer them to give such glorious and irrefragable proofs in favour of an imposture. They must then proceed from the Father of light and truth.

Moreover, the predictions delivered by Jesus in relation to his own ignominious sufferings and death, to his triumphant resurrection from the dead on the third day, and ascension into Heaven ; to the promised effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, whereby his Apostles were enabled to preach the gospel to every creature ; and to the final destruction of Jerusalem ; all exactly accomplished

plished in the event ; are so many additional convincing testimonies that He came forth from God, and went to God. To which must be added the ancient predictions of Moses and the Prophets concerning a future Messiah, all believed and insisted on by the Jews, and amazingly fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

If any be surprized that the Rulers and Doctors among the Jews could possibly resist evidences so incontestible as have here been represented ; be it remembered that malice and envy, those black humours of the human mind, are enough to obscure the brightest truths, and suppress the most cogent methods of conviction. For that their infidelity was not owing to want of evidence, if rightly attended to, is plain ; seeing they themselves acknowledged that He did many miracles, yet at the same time bent all their force and stratagems to render them ineffectual,

ineffectual, and destroy Him ; blasphemously alledging that he did his mighty works through the assistance of the Devil ; casting all out of the synagogue that believed on him ; sending forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might entrap him in his talk ; suborning false witnesses against him at his trial ; and lastly, bribing the soldiers who were the guards of his sepulchre, in order to stifle their testimony of his resurrection. And that all this was really the effect of malice, because He had charged them with hypocrisy, reproved their errors, and exposed their vices, appears from the behaviour of Pilate, who, it is said, knew that the Chief Priests had delivered him for envy ; and was therefore willing to release him, having examined and found no fault in him. — The truth is, the apprehension they were under lest a general belief in Jesus, through the mighty works which

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He did, might put an end to their credit with, and authority over the people, had blinded their understanding, and precluded all true judgment. And, thus much may suffice to evidence the divine authority of the Gospel-Revelation with respect to those, who both heard the words, and saw the works of Jesus.— Again, that they too were under the same obligation of believing it, who were witnesses of the Apostles' preaching, and of the signs and wonders wrought by their hands, results from a like method of reasoning. For it exceeds all human credibility, that a set of poor and illiterate men should on a sudden be endued with ability and resolution to proclaim, in every language under Heaven, a crucified Redeemer, and at the same time to back their testimony with a series of miracles performed in virtue of his name only; thereby converting great numbers to the faith, to whom
they

they also communicated such amazing powers; and this too in certain expectation, and under the immediate sense, of persecutions, torments, and death itself; unless they were really commissioned from above, and actuated and directed by an Almighty Agent.

The last thing to be considered under this head is, the grounds and reasonableness of their faith, who living in ages distant from the times of Christ and his Apostles, neither heard their preaching, nor saw their miracles. — Now it is plain they must be beholden to tradition of some sort or other for their information and assurance. But surely this can be no objection against the reasonableness of their believing; for what other method is there of coming at the knowledge of past transactions? And that such may be known with a sufficient degree of certainty will, I presume,

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sume, not be disputed. It is true oral tradition, though it may serve to keep up the remembrance of some principal facts, is not altogether to be depended on for an exact conveyance of truth; as being liable to additions and omissions in the relation, from every tongue by which it is transmitted. For which reason the Spirit of God hath not trusted the Christian Revelation to so vague and uncertain a testimony, but committed it to written characters, the most credible and authentic; insomuch that no one argument can be required, which does not stand in full force, and must ever do so, in favour of them. For that the books of the New Testament are really the works of those Authors whose names they bear, sufficiently appears, in that they were generally received by the Church from the beginning under that character; and constantly owned and testified by the Christians of that age, to

have been put into their hands by the Apostles themselves, as the groundwork and pillar of their faith.—Again, The immediate successors of the Apostles delivered the same for a standing rule of faith to all the Churches converted or established by their preaching.—In the mean while they were universally read by Christians in their Assemblies on the Lord's day ; and were therefore very early translated into various languages, and in a short time dispersed amongst different people of different nations ; who, as they all set an infinite value upon these sacred records, became so many spies on each other to prevent any forgery or corruption creeping into them. —We have moreover the testimony of innumerable writers on this subject, even from the apostolical age downwards ; men of different persuasions, orthodox and hereticks, friends and enemies to the Christian cause, who have
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quoted many passages out of these writings, and preserved large portions of them in their works : None of whom so much as pretended the Authors of them to be any other than the disciples and followers of Jesus. Thus may they be traced up through every age by an uninterrupted series of proofs to the very times wherein they were penned ; and when it was impossible but a relation of facts so extraordinary in their kind, and which had so lately and publickly happened, must, if false, have been instantly disproved.

If then succeeding ages have the utmost proof which the nature of the thing will admit of, that the books of the New Testament are the genuine writings of those Apostles and Evangelists whose names they bear, and that they contain a true account of the Religion of Jesus, and of the miraculous facts by which it

was confirmed ; they have as reasonable grounds of assurance that He was sent from God, and consequently are as much obliged to believe his doctrines and obey his laws, as those very persons were, who listened to the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth ; who heard his sermons, and saw his miracles. For the obligation a man is under to believe and obey any set of doctrines and precepts as of divine authority, arises from the means he hath of knowing them to be such. It matters not in what particular manner he is made acquainted with them ; whether by immediate inspiration, or upon the testimony of others evidently commissioned for that purpose : If he has but sufficient grounds of assurance that they came originally from God, he is equally concerned to receive them. And such assurance, I am persuaded, every honest mind may be possessed of upon the authority of the Evangelical Writers.

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For it is beyond contradiction that these men could not but be sure of the facts and doctrines they deliver, which they had seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears. Especially, as they wrote under the immediate influence and direction of the Holy Ghost; who was before promised to lead them into all truth, and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever Christ had said unto them.—Indeed to imagine that persons of their stations and characters had either inclination or power to impose upon the world is equally absurd; seeing all the wages they really had, or could expect for what they did, were only sufferings and death. Yet we find the Religion they preached universally prevailing in spite of all opposition, the most inveterate prejudices, and envenomed malice of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles. And whence all this? but because it was in truth, what they

with such mighty power declared it to be, *the Word of God.*

But if God's Word be a Revelation of *his* Will to Mankind, hence the peculiar blessedness derived upon those who hear this Word and keep it.—With a few Reflections on which I shall close this discourse.

2. True Religion is so very interesting a concern of man, who, as a rational and free Being is therefore accountable to his Maker, that every opportunity of knowing the divine will must be regarded as a blessing ; and the neglecting any such opportunity as a high degree of ingratitude, impiety and folly. We need only look back upon those times of ignorance before Christianity enlightened the world, to be sensible of the weakness of all human efforts to set men right in the most momentous points ; the performance

formance of acceptable worship toward their God, and the means of being reconciled to Him after the commission of trespasses and sins. Now these are fully made known to us in the gospel of his Son ; who is himself the way, and the truth, and the life ; without whom none cometh unto the Father ; but by virtue of whose doctrine and merits we may boldly present ourselves before the throne of Divine Grace. He hath revealed unto us the nature and perfections of the Deity, laid open the misery and impotence of our own degenerate state, taught us certain methods of obtaining pardon and peace here, and abundant happiness in a future and better world. How preposterous then is it, how ungrateful and impious, for any to stop their ears against such glad tidings, and refuse to hear the voice of Him who so clearly speaks to us from Heaven ? Surely the first notice of a Messenger from God

should excite the attention of every person that has any regard for himself, any love of truth, any desire of being saved. Common sense dictates the reasonableness of giving a *fair bearing* to so gracious a message. It is both the duty and privilege of every one in this case to examine into the credentials of the Teacher; the reality of his miracles, the purity of his precepts, the validity of his promises: But this, let me add, *with ingenuity and candor*. Otherwise, they may hear, and yet, like the infidel Jews, thereby bring down a curse upon themselves rather than a blessing. The charmer cannot influence those who have no ears to hear, charm he never so wisely: No more can he affect those who have ears but hear not; whose understanding is so clouded with prejudice, and their will vitiated by evil habits, as not to admit of any religious improvement how well soever administered. Hence that repeated admonition.

monition of our Blessed Lord to his Disciples, "Take heed how ye hear;" *i. e.* see that you bring with you unprejudiced and teachable dispositions to my preaching; for whosoever hath, *i. e.* whosoever receives the word with proper attention and sincerity, to him shall be given; but whosoever hath not, *i. e.* who through inattention or dishonesty, will not suffer the word to take root in his heart; from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. The former shall be blest with more abundant grace and understanding; whilst the latter shall be hardened in his ignorance and error. In allusion to which we are told, that the seed of the sower in the parable proved fruitful or unfruitful according to the good or bad quality of the soil whereon it fell; and that seed was the word of God: Excellently represented under the emblem of seed, as being in it's own nature productive of all virtue, and never failing

failing of a plentiful increase, when received into an honest and good heart; in which sense too we are taught to interpret the good ground.

But neither is a rectitude of disposition to know the will of God, the only necessary qualification toward entitling us to the blessing annexed. There must be likewise a sincerity of resolution to act conformably to it when known.— And this is emphatically specified in the text—“Blessed are they who hear the word of God and *keep it*.”—Or, as it is elsewhere expressed, “who having heard the word, *keep it*, and bring forth fruit with patience,” *i.e.* who after due examination, and full conviction of its truth and importance, both make it the standard of their belief, and the rule of their practice.

Faith, faith the Apostle, cometh by hearing: This is the first good effect of
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an honest attention to God's word ; and is too a necessary means of it's becoming more fruitful ; seeing the morals must needs be in proportion to the impressions of a reasonable faith. Hence, St. Paul, speaking of the disobedient Jews, faith, " The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."—Whereas He telleth the Thessalonians, that the same word worketh effectually in them that believe, in an exemplary production of patience, charity, and holiness.—And indeed without these good fruits all our pretensions to faith are hypocritical and absurd. For how is the reality of a man's faith to be proved but by his works ? Both hearing and believing being only the *means*, but *the end* virtue and a good conversation. So that to be hearers only and not doers of the word, is, as the Apostle speaks, to deceive our own selves : And for this reason ; because
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if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass : For as this man beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of person he was ; in like manner the inconsiderate hearer acknowledges for the present the truth and equity of God's law, and distinguishes his own vices reflected upon his conscience from the Holy Scriptures as from a mirror ; but having no settled design of applying the doctrine, and amending his life, he goeth his way too, and thinks no more either of the clearness and importance of God's word, or of the deformity of his own actions. And from this cause without all doubt it proceeds, that the manners and conversation of so many who have both opportunity and ability of knowing the truth, in whose hands are the Holy Scriptures, and who have the word of the gospel almost continually founding

sounding in their ears, are yet in no
 wise answerable to such special advan-
 tages. But surely Christianity is not a
 matter merely of theory and speculation :
 It is intended to make us better, in order
 that we may be happier men. Fully to
 understand, and to be able and ready, as
 occasions may offer, to vindicate our
 most holy Faith, may perhaps be con-
 sidered as the more immediate business of
 it's publick Professors: But to live holily
 and unblameably is the duty of them
 and all, and is too that substantial wis-
 dom which alone can render any wise
 unto salvation.

S E R M O N XXVI.

PSALM xxxvii. 38.

*Keep Innocency, and take heed unto the
Thing that is right ; for that shall bring
a Man Peace at the last.*

THIS entire Psalm appears to have been composed by Holy David, with a view to prevent or remove any offence, that might be taken by superficial observers, at the prosperity and splendour of wicked men, and the troubles and afflictions of the righteous ; which, it could not be denied, did frequently happen

pen even under a dispensation, whose professed sanctions were temporal rewards and punishments. In order therefore to vindicate the ways of Providence to such persons, he advises them in the first place to suppress every emotion of envy or indignation at the apparent successfulness of injurious and impious men; till, by due observation on the final consequences of things, they should be convinced, as he himself was, that the prosperity of finners is but a prelude to their destruction. "Fret not thyself (says he) because of the evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity: For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb."—And again, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree: Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea I sought him, but he could not be found." He then diverts their attention to the
other

other side, and bids them consider well the whole of the righteous man's case : That though, in the common course of this uncertain life, " he may come into misfortunes like other folk, and be plagued for a time like other men ;" yet from the use he makes of his sufferings, and the blessing of God upon his faithful perseverance in well-doing, his latter end shall be peaceful and happy : He shall at least be possessed of that inward serenity and joyful hope, which will never leave nor forsake him ; such as the good things of the world cannot give, neither can it's evil things take away. " Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright ; for the end of that man is peace." — Or, according to the old translation, " Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right ; for that shall bring a man peace at the last." From which pious admonition and encouraging exhortation of the Royal Psalmist

Pſalmiſt may be deduced the two following leſſons of religious importance.

First, That the general Truth of God's Promiſes is not to be queſtioned, by reaſon of any caſual Appearances to the contrary.

Secondly, That we have the greateſt Encouragement to maintain our Integrity, in oppoſition to this, and every other Temptation; becauſe the Effect of Virtue, ſooner or later, muſt be Happineſs.

I. That the former of theſe leſſons ſhould have been inculcated upon the Jews was peculiarly requiſite, becauſe, being ſubject to a law, that promiſed all temporal good things to as many as obſerved it, and threatened all manner of evil things to thoſe who brake it, they might be diſheartened from their obedi-

ence, when they saw the ungodly triumph, and the righteous persecuted and oppressed. And we find in fact that examples of this sort had an unhappy influence upon minds otherwise well disposed: Who knew not how to reconcile such seeming irregularities with the wisdom and justice of Providence, till they went into the sanctuary of God; *i. e.* till they thoroughly examined the matter upon cool and religious principles. And then they quickly perceived that the flourishing state of wicked persons was only for a moment; but that the virtuous and the godly were notwithstanding the favourites of Heaven. The splendid images of the former vanished out of the city, disappeared on a sudden, like those of a dream when one awaketh; whilst the latter inherited the earth, were delivered from much evil, and died in peace.

But if, under the Jewish œconomy,
many

many circumstances were to be weighed and adjusted, before any presumed to impeach the administration of divine government upon these accounts; how shall we be excused, if, under a better covenant, established upon better promises, whereof those of the law were but typical, we suffer our love of God and of his righteousness to wax cold, and withdraw our faith in Christ, upon a pretence so utterly unreasonable, as that the workers of iniquity do abound and prosper? For what assurance of any distinguishing favours, merely of a temporal kind, does the gospel afford even its most zealous votaries? It was, we know, the caution of our Lord himself to his first followers, that they should not expect worldly peace from the Religion He was about to introduce, but rather division and the sword; to be hated and persecuted unto death for his name's sake. And though, it must be

granted, such extraordinary ill usage was more naturally, as it was fatally, incident to those earlier days, yet have true and faithful Christians at all times but too much reason to adopt that declaration of St. Paul, that, "if in this life only they have hope in Christ, they are of all men most miserable." I say *true* and *faithful* Christians, in contradistinction to such as are Christians only by name and profession ; and who, having virtually renounced their spiritual birth-right of faith and hope, have as little respect to the laws, as they have to the promises, of the gospel. And what wonder, if persons void of all religious principle, and ready to close with every opportunity of sensual pleasure or worldly gain, should live in a state of habitual indulgence, increase in riches, and appear at least happier than much better men ? Such as fear not God, neither regard man, but where their own immediate

diate interest is concerned, have a manifest advantage in this respect over the pious and upright ; who flee all sinful pleasures, and dare not intermeddle with the emoluments of corruption.

The characteristick of every sincere Christian is, that he lives by faith and not by sight ; by faith in the promises of God, not in conformity to the examples of a vain and deceitful world. His conversation (as the Apostle expresses himself) is in Heaven ; forasmuch as his thoughts and meditations, his views and expectancies, are finally fixed upon those happy regions, where he is fully assured his home and his inheritance are. It is not therefore for such an one to be diverted from his main pursuit either by the allurements or the difficulties that he may meet with in the way. If a land flowing with milk and honey be the object infallibly promised, why, like the

foolish Israelites, should any repine at the delicacies of Egypt left behind? Or, what to us is much the same, at the past pleasures of youth; which call more rationally for our repentance, than even for a wish to repeat them? — Why murmur at the dreariness of the desert, those cares and troubles of maturer age, which make a necessary part of our journey through the wilderness of life? — Or why be disheartened on account of imaginary giants on the borders of the country, the infirmities, pain and sickness, that attend the close of our days, and bring us down to the grave, through the gates of which we shall so quickly be conveyed to the mansions of immortality and bliss? — Nothing, in short, but an unshaken trust in what God has been pleased to reveal, is a principle sufficient to overcome a world so full of doubtful appearances as this, wherein we are conversant. But faith in the promises of God over-

cometh

cometh the world. This it was that recommended Abraham to those illustrious titles, the *Friend of God*, and *Father of the Faithful*; that against hope he believed in hope, as the Apostle speaks; thoroughly persuaded that what God had promised, how incomprehensible soever, He was able also to perform.— And we too, who are the Sons of Abraham, and heirs of his faith, are not without the greatest encouragement to hold fast our integrity, in opposition to every temptation, and specious appearance; because assured by the same word of promise, that the effect of righteousness, sooner or later, shall be peace.—Which was the second lesson of useful consideration proposed from the text.

2. Notwithstanding then the present life is certainly not a state of recompence, but of probation only; and though the visible course of things may seem to run

in favour of dishonesty and irreligion ; yet is it by no means to be imagined, that God can at any time disregard the persons of just and pious men, or abandon the cause of virtue even in this world. What presents itself to our view is barely the surface and outside of things ; and from this it is that we are apt to form our judgment of happiness and unhappiness. But upon a closer inspection, we shall soon discover that wicked men are not those happy persons which they themselves pretend, and others oftentimes suppose them to be. There is ever an alloy of bitterness incorporated with their sweetest pleasures ; some secret moth that frets and corrodes their most valuable acquisitions. The spirit within them is wounded ; they live at variance with their own reason ; horribly afraid of dying, and trembling at the apprehension of what is to come after.

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In the mean while, it is readily acknowledged, that neither the best disposition, nor the most upright conduct, can secure any from ordinary troubles, publick calamities, or even the injurious treatment of malicious and uncharitable men.—The righteous in this mixed state must have their share in affliction; and it is better for them that they should: Since they are happily disciplined thereby unto juster sentiments of things; are trained up to an acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence, and resignation to the divine will; a virtuous contempt for the sinful allurements of this world, and a steady faith in the unknown happiness of the next. Hence a spring of comfort from within themselves infinitely more desirable than the most flattering prosperity of evil doers: A conscience void of offence towards God and towards Man; that continual feast of the soul, never cloying, always satisfying.

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It is moreover an inestimable source of tranquillity and consolation under the worst outward circumstances, what we learn from the gospel, that the divine Spirit is on such occasions especially ready to shed his friendly influence upon good and pious minds; silently supporting, refreshing, strengthening them; and withal interceding for them at the throne of Grace, (as St. Paul most pathetically expresses it) with groanings that cannot be uttered.

But the advantages of this inward peace, which is a general attendant on an innocent and religious life, are then most discernible and of greatest moment, at the last; at the approach of Death; that King of Terrors, as it is commonly and deservedly called; being the thing to which of all others we have the strongest aversion. — At what time the body is racked with pain, the animal spirits

Spirits exhausted, and this our earthly tabernacle just about to be dissolved; when neither riches, nor power, nor friends, can any longer avail to our preservation, our security, or our ease; to have then the testimony of our consciences that with simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world; and in consequence thereof to be possessed of a rational well-grounded hope of a blessed immortality, is such a happy state of mind, at so gloomy and uncomfortable a season, that it well deserves the care of our whole lives to provide and ensure it. — But now, there is no other way of obtaining this, than by a timely and due attention to this general precept, “Keep innocence, and take heed unto the thing that is right; because that, and that only, shall bring a man peace at the last.” — To this indeed must be added a firm trust in the mercies of God, through
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the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ : Forasmuch as the best men, conscious to themselves of many sins, and numberless deviations from divine law, cannot abide the trial of severe justice, but in virtue of his atonement, who, by his own death upon the cross has destroyed sin, the sting of death, and is therefore “ able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by Him ; seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

But if such extraordinary means of divine grace, even the precious blood of the only-begotten Son of God, be indispensibly necessary for the salvation of the most holy and virtuous of mankind ; where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ? What comfort shall they find, or whither shall they flee for refuge, in their latest extremities, who have all along despised the goodness and forbearance

ance of God, calling, and waiting continually for their repentance? — We may be assured, that neither the precarious groans and vows of a death-bed, nor the ministry of the Priest, nor any other expedient, can change the conditions of the gospel covenant, or alter the thing that is gone out of those lips which are never opened in vain. God himself hath said it, “ There is no peace to the wicked :” And the Apostle hath declared in his name, “ Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

May it therefore be the first and principal concern of every one amongst us, at least in this our day, whilst we are blessed with grace and opportunity, to know and pursue the things that belong unto our peace, our present and eternal peace, before they are hid from our eyes !

S E R M O N XXVII.

I. THESSALONIANS, V. 16.

Rejoice evermore.

THE great excellence and design of the Christian Religion, is to conduct it's professors through this pilgrimage of life, with as much ease, complacency and comfort, as the present constitution of human affairs will possibly admit of ; till they come to that final rest, and happiness, prepared for the spirits of just men made perfect. All it's revealed truths, it's precepts, it's promises, and even it's threatenings, are plainly

plainly and admirably adapted to this most gracious purpose; that by informing our minds, directing our wills, and settling our affections upon their proper objects, we might rejoice in God here, and enjoy Him hereafter. — The first endearing invitation of our Blessed Redeemer was Rest, rest to the wearied soul; and his last legacy was Peace.

If then we are miserable under so auspicious and comfortable a dispensation, it must be our own fault; either owing to some unhappy misconception of the heavenly doctrines of the gospel, or to some negligent or wilful opposition to its holy institutes. Hence these affectionate and repeated admonitions of St. Paul to all true Disciples of Christ — “Rejoice evermore” — “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice.” — “Finally, my Brethren, rejoice in the Lord.”

What

What shall we say then of those unhappy zealots, who place so great a part of Religion in a superstitious severity, and melancholy dread? Thereby contributing, how undesignedly soever, to bring an evil report upon the best thing in the world, and to deprive men of their only secure convoy through the storms and tempests, the rocks and shallows, of a transitory, but dangerous life.

It must be allowed that the care of a man's soul, and the ensuring it's everlasting welfare, after that the present scene of things shall vanish away, is a very serious matter; as it is the most important of any he can possibly be concerned in; and requires at all times a sober and vigilant conduct: Yet is there nothing frightful in all this; nothing but what is agreeable to right reason, and which for the most part carries it's own reward along with it; however
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is always attended with comfortable expectations.

But the better to obviate all dishonourable notions of our most holy and peaceful Religion, and withal to come at a right understanding of this peculiar injunction of the Apostle—*Rejoice evermore*—It shall be my present business,

First—To explain the true import of the Text. — And then,

Secondly—To shew that, taken in it's just sense, it is both the special duty, and the singular privilege, of every good Christian.

1. Now whereas joy in some degree or other is the very end which men propose to themselves in all their projects and undertakings; and which, it must be owned, they in general pursue with

much greater application than is consistent with wisdom and virtue; one might perhaps at first fight be ready to except against such a precept, as of a dangerous tendency, or at best needless and superfluous.—But though it be true, mankind are extravagantly addicted to their gratifications and pleasures; yet upon a nearer survey of things we shall find, that the world is full of uneasiness and dissatisfaction, of murmurings and repinings. And the reason is, because so few take the right method to make themselves happy; or follow after that joy which alone is durable and constant. Notwithstanding therefore this object of a man's duty be what his soul of it's own free motion longs for, yet to place it in a right point of view, and urge him on to the readiest and most effectual way of obtaining it, was well worthy the care and recommendation of an Apostle. And such without doubt was the intent of

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St. Paul in the particular precept now before us ; than whom no one could better estimate the nature and value of that spiritual rejoicing, which he had himself so happily experienced in every station. — The mirth of the world is commonly vain, unreasonable, and unsatisfactory ; either occasioned through a mere suppression of thought, amidst the hurry of company, the intoxication of luxury, or the charms of dissipation, which quite unstring the mind, and take it off for a while from reflecting on the many incidental evils of the present state, and the far more interesting concerns of death, judgment and eternity. — Or else this worldly mirth is excited by some temporal felicity and success ; very apt to elate the spirits into a giddy and insolent kind of joy : As was the case of the rich man in the gospel, who, in confidence of his full barns, was presumptuous enough to say unto his soul — “ Soul,

thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry."—But it cannot surely be conceived of so grave an Instructor, that he should encourage Christians in any such jollity as this ; which is indeed joy falsely so called, of a trifling and transient nature, supported by no solid foundation, and which can never bring a man peace at the last. The rejoicing recommended in my text is of much too serious and consistent a cast to be indebted for its being, either to so negative a principle as absence of thought, or to one so precarious as the gifts of fortune.—So far in reality is it from depending on the former of these, that it necessarily requires a just knowledge of God and of ourselves ; a thorough consideration of spiritual as well as natural, of eternal as well as temporal, matters. And so far is it from relying on the latter, without respecting God in them, that the very
life

life and spirit of it consists in an habitual, rational cheerfulness under all the dispensations of Providence, whether they be in themselves joyous or grievous; in the testimony of our consciences that we incline toward such things as please Him best; and in a well-grounded confidence of enjoying Him to all eternity, through the satisfaction of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

And hence we may observe, that there are in fact many special duties included under this general one of Rejoicing, and which necessarily terminate in it; such as a prevailing Sense and Love of God—Resignation to his will—Patience under sufferings — Contentment — Gratitude. Add to these a stedfast Faith in the divine promises, together with a lively Hope of good things to come in another life, through the merits of our Redeemer, arising from a consciousness of having

sincerely endeavoured to serve and please God, From all which results a constant spring of such cheerful serenity, such gladness of heart, as no melancholy nor disastrous accidents can either trouble or dry up. Other worldly joys may be noisy and tumultuous, but they are empty and short-lived ; like the crackling of thorns under a pot, to which Solomon compares the laughter of a fool. Whereas this is a calm and permanent kind of joy, that will stick by a man in all the changes of outward circumstance : According to those observations of the Psalmist, " Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness ; surely he shall not be moved for ever ; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings ; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." — So St. Paul tells us that " he took pleasure even in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake." And we find the Prophet Habakuk
comforting

comforting himself with this pious resolution, that —“ Although the fig-tree should not blossom, neither should fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive should cease, and the field should yield no meat, the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stalls; yet he would rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his Salvation.”

Thus much for the import of this peculiar injunction, “*Rejoice evermore*”— I proceed in the next place to shew that, according to it's just meaning, it is both the special duty and singular privilege of every good Christian.

2. And here let me observe—a like obligation lies upon us to rejoice evermore, as does to observe always the Commandments of the Gospel; the certain consequence of which is gladness of

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heart. But because, through the weakness of our mortal nature, the very best men frequently deviate from the other Christian precepts, upon that very account they must too proportionably fall short of this. The rule however is in it's self good, as are all the rest we are required to follow ; and the surest way to compass this, is to be as perfect as we can in all the other branches of our duty. True Religion and true Joy are in a manner the same things, at least are so interwoven that nothing can disjoin them.

For instance—How is it possible for a man to believe the glad tidings of a spiritual Redeemer, the happy means of being reconciled to his God, and the many glorious things which Christ hath promised—I say, how is it possible for a man to believe all this, (so as to comply with the conditions) without being filled at the same time with all peace and joy in

in believing?—Or, what is Hope but the very effort of rejoicing, when we can apply to our particular selves those saving truths and precious promises which are offered unto all, through the heavenly doctrines and meritorious sufferings of the Son of God? when we can anticipate the enjoyments of a future and better world by a pleasing foretaste, and cry out with the Apostle, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me at that day.”—Again, every instance of piety, each act of devout address, hath a peculiar delight annexed to it.—When we meet together in the House of God, to make our supplications for future favours before the Throne of his Majesty, and to praise Him with thankful hearts for past mercies; the pious Christian must needs be transported with that awful thought, that the eyes of the Lord
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are over the Righteous, and his ears open unto their prayers. Rational devotion is a most pleasing exercise to the soul : It raises a man above the consideration of sensual objects, fixes his attention upon things spiritual, and introduces him into a kind of solemn familiarity with his Maker.—Nay, even that godly sorrow, and contrition of heart, which men feel for past sins, are not without their consolation; and the tears of the penitent, like a watered garden, are very productive of joyful fruits.—To these must be joined the secret but sincere pleasures, which never fail to attend upon every species, every degree, of Charity. How honest the satisfaction, how heart-felt the joy, of doing good to our fellow creatures in any respect?—We are indeed admonished by St. Paul, that God loveth a chearful giver, and that he who sheweth mercy should do it with chearfulness: And it may be asked, who
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can, out of a pure spirit of Charity, give alms, or shew mercy without being possessed of this happy temper? Seeing that by relieving his neighbour he relieveth himself; eases his own bowels, gratifies his own mind, and at the same time dischargeth an office highly acceptable to God, making Him his debtor, and engaging Him abundantly to requite and reward his beneficence. — Lastly, what entertainment can compare with that of a good conscience? This is the merry heart which Solomon speaks of, that hath a continual feast, never cloying, always satisfying. To descend into the chambers of a man's own breast, and find there no lurking vice, no sin unrepented of, none but what he has all reason to believe is expiated by the blood of his Redeemer, is a contemplation full of such solid joy, as no man, nor any circumstance of things can take from him; such as will not forsake

forfake him in the Hour of Death, nor in the Day of Judgment.

From these and the like considerations, we may easily conceive how incumbent it is upon every faithful Christian to "rejoice evermore," or, to maintain within him a chearful spirit under all the manifold dispensations of Providence: And that, because true joy is the necessary product of those Christian graces he is bound to cultivate; such as are Faith and Hope, Devotion and Charity, and a Conscience void of offence.—And can we chuse but admire the goodness of God, who hath made our delight to be our duty, and hath so ordered the whole frame of our Religion, as that it naturally creates joy in all those who heartily embrace it?

For as thus to rejoice is the special duty, so is it the distinguishing privilege,
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of every *good Christian*. A wicked man can have no pretensions to any real joy; all which being founded on reflection is therefore inconsistent with the horrors of a guilty conscience. How shall he rejoice, who has reason to tremble every moment lest he be plunged into utter darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth?—There are, it is true, certain enjoyments, falsely so called and esteemed, which are the very groundwork and support of wickedness; as the gratification of sinful appetites and passions, the diverting away thought, or the drowning the senses in excess and riot. But these are false and counterfeit rejoicings, necessarily short, always attended with regret, and in the end degenerating into remorse and bitterness.—“In the laughter of sinners (as the wise man observed) the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.” The Prophet Isaiah compares the wicked,
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in regard to their inward perturbation and disquietude, to a troubled sea —

“ The wicked (says he) are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt : There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

And right reason will teach us the same truth ; which a little observation too may serve to confirm. For what satisfaction can he take in the most pleasurable pursuits, who, with all his laboured infidelity is unable to shake off the belief of a God, or stifle the apprehensions of a judgment to come ; and yet walks directly contrary to the divine laws, and to the dictates of his own conscience ? — The miserable shifts to which such an one is reduced for a little delusive and momentary quiet, may perhaps just help to make him tolerable to himself, and to save appearances in the eye of the world : But this we may venture to pronounce, that the licentious

tious and profane live in a continued state of hypocrisy with their own hearts; always affecting to suppress real fears by a dissembled negligence and mirth. Vice ever was, and ever will be, the parent of uneasiness and terror; nor is it in the power of the most ingenious libertine to invert it's nature; though he "call evil good, and good evil; though he put darkness for light, and light for darkness; though he put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

In a word—To rejoice evermore is what we are enjoined: But where shall we meet with a fund of perpetual Joy? Pleasure, short-lived Pleasure must own it is not in her; and the greatest worldly Prosperity would tell us, it is not in me. However it is yet to be found, if we search for it where we ought, *i. e.* in the paths of Religion and Virtue; in

a right Faith and a Conscience void of offence. These, we may rest assured, are the only sovereign antidotes against melancholy and sorrow, and the never-failing sources of true Joy here, and of Joys inconceivable and everlasting hereafter——Unto which God in his due time bring us all, through the alone merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON

S E R M O N XXVIII.

JOHN, v. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

THE leading crime, with which our Blessed Saviour charged the Jews, as the cause of their rejecting the true Messias, was their not attending to those Holy Scriptures which testified of him.

“ Had ye believed Moses, said He, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of me: But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”

An imputation this, we may imagine, little expected and as little relished by

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that

that people ; who pretended the highest veneration for their divine Legislator, and an implicit obedience to his dictates; not considering that they even then forfeited their allegiance to him, by refusing to hear that Prophet, whose heavenly mission, character, and credentials, had been expressly foretold and delineated by Moses himself ; who had also admonished them in the name of the Lord, and under the severest penalty, to “ hear that Prophet in all things, whatsoever He should say unto them.”

The case was—they had so long taken up with erroneous interpretations of Scripture ; had so fondly adapted the Word of Prophecy to their own private opinions and prejudices ; that the very power of investigating the truth was in a manner precluded. They were become blind to the clearest evidence, and their heart was darkened.

But

But since the crime objected against the Jews is too justly chargeable on many Christians ; who, under the glorious light of the Gospel Revelation, either by withdrawing from the use of *others*, wresting to their *own* destruction, or disdainfully neglecting the sacred records, very much lessen the good effect of God's Word upon the minds and actions of men—It shall therefore be the subject of the following Discourse,

To enquire, first, into the general obligation and true import of this precept—*Search the Scriptures*—

In order, secondly, to recommend and enforce a due observance of it.

i. It hath pleased Almighty God, as “ at sundry times,” so “ in diverse manners ” to reveal Himself and his Will to man—to Moses by familiar intercourse—

to the other Prophets by dreams and visions—and in the fulness of time by his only begotten Son. Which gracious discoveries must needs have been very powerful and convincing with those persons to whom they were communicated, under the immediate testimony of mighty signs and wonders; and we may flatter ourselves that had we lived in the days of the Prophets, we should have readily believed whatsoever they delivered, without doubt or scruple. Yet let no one think that the want of such evidence takes off from the reasonableness, or will excuse the deficiency, of our faith. The advantage is pronounced to be on our side: “Blessed are they (said our Lord) who have not seen and yet have believed.” It is true, Moses is dead, and the Prophets are dead; neither do our old men dream dreams, nor our young men see visions; miracles have ceased, and God in the form of a servant dwells no more with
men

men on the earth. Still, the all-wise Governor of the World hath taken especial care that we also, upon whom the latter days are come, should not be destitute of sufficient proof, nor of any rational incitement to work out our salvation. He hath favoured us with the most authentic Records of his moral Government and providential Dispensations; of such infinite importance, and so divinely penned, that whoever reads may "find rest to his soul." For as "prophecy came not in old time by the will of Man, but holy Men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;" so the Holy Scriptures also come to us, indited by the same divine Spirit; written aforetime, and preserved for our learning, that we "through patience and comfort of them might have hope."—This is an anchor to the Christian both sure and stedfast.

The weakness of Man, joined with the malice of Satan, would in course of time have easily corrupted the revealed will of God, had it relied on the uncertainty of oral tradition: True Revelation had been long since rendered fabulous, and counterfeit traditions passed for authentic. But the sacred writings were neither liable to such corruption, neither have they suffered it; being still fully possessed of every degree of evidence, that the nature of things will possibly admit of. So truly may our Blessed Saviour be said in this respect also to be with us alway, in that we have at this day as powerful motives to faith and obedience, as they had, who heard his sermons and who saw his works.

— But now—If the Holy Scripture be a standing declaration of the divine will; given unto us that we might know the certainty of those things which are written;

written; and, as St. John testifies, "that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through his name;" it must be the undoubted privilege as well as indispensable duty of every individual (who hath it in his power) to read, learn, and inwardly digest those spiritual truths, which so nearly concern him, and on which his eternal happiness depends. — This indeed is a point so agreeable to reason, and to the express commandment of God, both under the law of Moses, and under the gospel of Christ, as to want no enlargement before a Protestant audience. I proceed therefore to offer a few considerations respecting a right performance of the duty itself.

It is an old complaint that no book was ever so well written, but through ill will, or misconstruction, it hath been undervalued; and so it fares with the

Holy Bible—the Book of Life. Some from the matter, others from the style, method, or on some other account, either charge it with falshood, or think contemptuously of it; and many perhaps merely because it is cheap and common; like the Children of Israel, who loathed their Manna. Notwithstanding, whoever with pious and upright intention peruses the sacred volumes, will be obliged to confess with Holy David, that—

“ The law of the Lord is an undefiled
 “ law, converting the soul; that the
 “ testimony of the Lord is sure, and
 “ giveth wisdom unto the simple; that
 “ the statutes of the Lord are right, and
 “ rejoice the heart; that the command-
 “ ment of the Lord is pure, and giveth
 “ light unto the eyes; that the fear of
 “ the Lord is clean, and endureth for
 “ ever; that the judgments of the Lord
 “ are true, and righteous altogether.”

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It cannot then be, but that the blasphemous ignorance, with which some men persecute the Word of God, must arise, either from their not searching it at all, or their not searching it aright. In the former case, as I have already shewn, they omit a plain and weighty duty ; and in the latter they cause that, which should be their guide unto truth, to be unto them an occasion of stumbling. As therefore it is incumbent on every one to search the Scriptures, it is too every one's concern to search them in such a manner, that they may be unto them, what the Apostle assures us they are in themselves—" The Power of God unto Salvation." In order to which happy use of the Scriptures, I observe,

First, That the precept of the text implies much more than a cursory reading.

To *search* the Scriptures is to apply to
them

them with diligence and attention—to examine well the grounds of credibility they exhibit—the completion of ancient prophecies—the number of astonishing miracles—the divine nature of the doctrines—the purity of the precepts—together with the extreme importance of the sanctions, contained in them. And this, in order to the procuring a safe and satisfactory rule of faith and morals; by which we may so direct our steps through the present life, as to intitle ourselves to a happy immortality in that which is to come.

An obstinate neglect of these means of religious knowledge was what subjected the Jews both to the personal rebukes of Christ, and to the final vengeance of Heaven.—We find too that a sober and rational enquiry into the merits of scripture-testimony is required of *All*, according to their stations and capacities,

cities, by these very scriptures; and that the observers of such pious practice are honourably mentioned and applauded in them.—Certain it is, whoever reads the Bible, without seriously adverting to the weighty truths, and holy injunctions it delivers, *might as well, perhaps better, not read at all.* The Word in this case shares a like Fate with the good Seed which fell upon stony ground; the product, if there be any, of the one as that of the other, having no depth of root, withereth before it groweth up. It was not owing to their not having read the Scriptures, but to a want of duly investigating and fairly applying them, that the Jews fulfilled the voices of the Prophets, in condemning and crucifying the Lord of Life. And to what else shall we impute that deluge of impiety and wickedness, which overflows the Christian world, than an unaccountable inattention to those glorious promises and tremendous

mendous threatenings, by which an obedience to the Gospel Institutes is providentially bound upon the Consciences of Men?

Again — The precept of searching the Scriptures gives no encouragement to an over scrupulous inquisitiveness into the abstruse nature of those awful truths, therein proposed as objects of faith and trials of it. There are mysteries both in the Bible, and in the Book of Nature. The *latter*, learned and curious men entertain themselves by inquiring into with much study and application: And after all their researches are still under a necessity of believing what they can never comprehend. But it happens otherwise with Scripture-Scepticks: These commonly entangle themselves amidst speculative enquiries into matters too high for them, till they imagine there is no truth in them; and then speak
evil

evil of those things which they understand not.

“ Verily, He with whom we have to do is a God that hideth himself,” as saith the Prophet. “ Clouds and darkness are round about him;” nor is it given unto us to see him in our present state, even by the light of his own gracious Revelations, but as through a veil purposely thrown over them. Hence that rapturous eulogy of St. Paul, which the astonishing display of divine attributes in the œconomy of man’s redemption had extorted from him—“ O the depth of
 “ the riches both of the wisdom and
 “ knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways
 “ past finding out !”—Notwithstanding therefore it is one of the excellencies of the gospel, that there is enough therein for the use of the simplest; yet is it folly and presumption to think that by our strictest

strictest searches we shall be able to fathom the whole mystery of godliness, *God manifest in the Flesh*. He, who shut up the sea with doors, and said, "hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed;" hath fixed as determined bounds to man's reasoning pride, which he cannot pass. It is enough for us to acquiesce in what God hath spoken, (provided there be testimony sufficient that he hath spoken it) because *we* are liable to error, and *his* word is truth.

Moreover—the precept of the text requires a fair and candid judgment of words and things, when we peruse the Holy Scriptures. We are not to try the Word of God by our own preconceived opinions, but to regulate our opinions by the rule of his Word. Prejudice and fancy must be entirely discarded, when we set about a duty of such importance.

Reason

Reason indeed properly directed will be found an excellent auxiliary : But prepossession and partiality, when we are searching after truth, are surely most unreasonable. To pick out here and there a text of Scripture without considering the relation it bears to others ; and to insist upon the words of an inspired writer in one place, and yet overlook what the same writer by the same inspiration speaks in another, in defence of an error before imbibed ; is like taking a second draught of poison, to make the former operate with the greater violence : And is too a most wicked trifling with the God of Truth, who hath threatened to take the part of such out of the book of life. And yet, it is not to be concealed, this impious abuse of Scripture has been the cause, and is still the support of the most enormous and absurd tenets, that have ever been obtruded upon and disgraced the Christian Church.

What

What remains is to recommend and enforce an humble and ingenuous attention to the Holy Scriptures; as being a duty both piously entertaining, and of infinite consequence.

To enquire after truth in general is the proper employ of a rational soul, and to find it, it's singular happiness. But of all other, *religious Truth* is most desirable; in that it brings us nearest to God, who is the adorable fountain of truth itself. Seeing then the Holy Scriptures are the undoubted Oracles of Religion; by which, as by the ladder in the Patriarch's dream, is the most regular ascent from darkness to light, from error to truth, from earth to heaven: Surely a prospect so delightful, how difficult soever the way that led to it, must needs invite the most indifferent and unactive spirit. But such is the excellence of the sacred writings, they charm whilst

whilst they instruct. They do not carry us as through a barren wilderness to the promised land ; but entertain the Reader with whatever is wont to recommend the best human compositions.— Who that peruses the Old Testament can chuse but admire that majesty of style, and grandeur of expression, with which the Prophets deliver the Word of God ? The Psalms of David, the Book of Job, with some other poetical portions of Holy Writ, present us with such exalted descriptions of the Supreme Being, and such animated pictures of Nature, as can never fail to warm and elevate the soul. And who is not touched with that primitive simplicity peculiar to the sacred Writers in their historical narrations ? Again — Whatever Disciple attends our Blessed Saviour through the whole miraculous course of his ministry, cannot but be happily transported, not with his power only,

but likewise with his benignity to men. When we observe Him opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, and restoring those that were possessed; how must we adore Him, the great author of divine light—who is himself the resurrection, and the life—and who came to destroy the works of the Devil! — At the same time so compendious and plain, so modest and impartial are the relations of the Evangelists, as must please and edify the best as well as the meanest Reader.

A book in all respects so entertaining might, one would think, (abstracting the obligation which Religion lays upon us,) recommend itself to the natural curiosity of man. But when we consider farther that to search this heavenly book is not only an agreeable employment, but a necessary and momentous duty; what abundant reason have we to study
and

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and meditate on those inestimable truths which God in his mercy hath caused to be written for our information and comfort ! — The future condition of the soul, or what will become of us after this short and unsatisfactory life, is, I presume, worth the enquiry of the wisest men ; and what indeed the wisest men of all ages have thought it proper to search after. But that immortal life, which was seen by them only, as through a glass, darkly, is to us brought to light through the Scriptures. By these we come to the knowledge of God, and that of ourselves. They describe Him to us by those awful attributes of infinity, power, and justice, which render Him the proper object of our admiration and reverence : And also in those gentler attributes of goodness, mercy, and truth ; which excite our love of, and dependance on Him. They shew us how great we were in our original creation, how

vile in our fall; the impotence of our lapsed, and the dignity of our renewed estate. Hereby we are assured that the present life is only to prepare us for a better: That we term a dissolution is only a temporary parting with our bodies: But that an eternal state of happiness or misery will attend the observance or neglect of the duties which they propose: That by them we shall be justified, or by them condemned.

Now, writings of such moment who, that has the privilege and power of searching, would willingly be ignorant of? or implicitly rely on others for his knowledge in matters of such infinite concern? — Be it therefore our principal care, who are blessed with these happy means of grace and salvation, with all religious joy and gratitude so advantageously to use them, that by a diligent attention to the history and doctrines
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of the Holy Scriptures, we may be able to give an answer to every man, that asks us the reason of our faith ; and which is of infinitely greater importance, secure to ourselves, by an obedience to the precepts they enjoin, a title to the rewards they promise through the merits of our Redeemer.

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JOHN, vii. 46.

Never Man spake like this Man.

SUCH was the remarkable answer of
 certain Officers, who had been com-
 missioned from the great Council at Je-
 rusalem, to apprehend Jesus; being ques-
 tioned at their return, “ Why have ye
 not brought him?”

The truth is—Many of the common
 people, whose judgments were less pre-
 judiced, and their attention more free
 and candid, upon seeing the miracles
 which

which he did, and withal hearing his doctrines, began to think him in reality a Teacher sent from God : Some saying, "*This is the Prophet,*" others, "*This is the Christ :*" Which coming to the ears of the Chief Priests and Pharisees, they were alarmed for the consequences of his preaching, lest the authority of them and of their traditions should be diminished thereby ; and therefore sent out Ministers to lay hold on him ; who no sooner betook themselves to the execution of their warrant, than they too were captivated by his words ; and, instead of apprehending the Preacher, returned to those who had sent them with this single apology for their conduct, that, *Never Man spake like this Man.*

It is obvious to remark, that the Officers sent upon this errand were at that time no friends either to the person or character of Jesus ; perhaps indifferent

as to the subject of his preaching; however certainly proceeding with an hostile intent: Till overpowered and convinced by the strength and evidence of his reasoning, they became altogether disarmed of their malice; and with an uncommon ingenuousness gave publick testimony in his favour.—From whence arises an argument for the truth and efficacy of our Lord's doctrine.—Such as are prepossessed with a good opinion of their Teacher, whoever he be, are certainly more apt to give credit to his sayings; and may perhaps sometimes, through partiality and a credulous disposition, swallow down falshood under the appearance of truth. But when a man's hearers are his professed enemies, or at best mere disinterested and unconcerned strangers; if those are convinced even against their inclinations, or these are irresistibly affected with the evidence of important propositions they had never before dreamt of;

of; this can be owing to nothing but the power of truth itself, which in the end must always prevail. And this was plainly the case of the Officers in the text: Who contrary to their prejudices, their intentions and interests, were captivated by the force of Christ's words, and could not but acknowledge in the presence of their bigotted and jealous Rulers, that "*Never Man spake like this Man.*"—Nor is this superiority of truth to be wondered at; being of the essence of the Deity, and congenial with the human soul. So that when clearly proposed, it carries conviction along with it; men naturally embrace it; and can never, but by a wilful and unnatural blindness, deny it admission.—It shall therefore be my business in the following discourse to make some candid enquiry into the nature of Christ's doctrine; shewing the general fitness of it, upon the principles of human reason, to
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the ordinary apprehension of every sober and unprejudiced person.

And to this purpose, I shall consider the doctrine of Christ as divided into two branches :—The one whereof consists of a republication of the moral law refined and perfected—the other, of a revelation of the means whereby man, who in his fallen state cannot keep the law, may be reconciled to his offended God, and obtain eternal salvation.

1. With regard then to the former of these, the merely moral part of Christ's doctrine—forasmuch as it is built upon the foundation of that law, which was originally engraven on man's heart by the finger of his Creator; the entire suitability thereof to the order and harmony of things will, I presume, be readily seen and confessed. —The great notices of natural light, "*to do justly, to love mercy,*

mercy, and to walk humbly with God," as the Prophet speaks—or, in the words of the Apostle, "*to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,*"—have been at all times acknowledged, as well by confiderate Heathens, as by God's more peculiar and enlightened People; and the truth and fitness of them maintained by universal consent and approbation. What Nations, I mean what civilized Nations, but have concurred in owning a dependance upon, and obligation to the Supreme Being, how much soever differing in their mistaken modes of divine worship? What intelligent part of mankind but have ever held justice and equitable dealing, sobriety and temperance, patience, fortitude, and beneficence, for virtues of the first magnitude? It must then needs be that these natural dictates, thus universally acknowledged, are true, and originally from Heaven: And are not the moral precepts

precepts of Christianity perfectly conformable to these established notices? Are they not indeed these very notices set in a stronger light, made more refined, spiritual, and extensive?

For though the doctrine of Christ, as to the moral or practical part of it, is really built (as hath been said) upon the foundation of the law of nature, and so stands upon a certain infallible basis; yet it must be granted, the superstructure is much more elevated and widened; as in all reason it ought to be; seeing the promise of an infinitely greater reward justly calls us to a higher degree of virtue. But notwithstanding this, every member of it is equally true and binding, as being in the strictest relation connected with each other: And no one additional precept in the gospel is made to oppose or contradict any that had been taught by nature or by Moses; but only to fill up
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and compleat those lines of duty, which either the narrowness of man's comprehension, or the wickedness of his heart, had shortened and rendered imperfect.

To instance in some particulars.—Where the law had said, "*Thou shalt not kill,*" it was evidently a reasonable addition to, and a proper fence about that law, "*Thou shalt not be angry with thy brother without a cause.*" For who can say to what extremity of guilt the indulging causeless anger may hurry a man?—Again—Where the law had said, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery,*" it was certainly a fit caution to be inserted, which guarded also against *impure imaginations, and criminal desires.*

So likewise—concerning the prohibition of *taking God's name in vain*; when men had confined that commandment to perjury only, it was a necessary explanation

nation of it, to forbid all manner of swearing in their ordinary conversation; and to restrain it within the lawful bounds of assertion and negation, *Yea yea, Nay nay; because what is more than this cometh of evil—i. e. proceeds from some inherent evil at the heart, and irreverence towards God.*

To these let me add one other gospel-precept, that of *loving our enemies*: And this the rather, because it hath been represented as a hard doctrine and new; reducible to no preceding law, unnatural in itself, and mischievous in its consequences. Whereas this excellent precept is plainly founded on that Levitical law, "*Thou shalt love thy Neighbour*;" which the Jewish Doctors having infamously explained away by annexing a latter part, "*and hate thine Enemy*," it pleased our Blessed Lord to recover and illustrate that law, by interpreting the
word

word Neighbour in it's full and genuine extent, as comprehending even an Enemy. — By virtue whereof, though it is by no means required that we should have the same affection or regard for wicked and injurious persons, as for the good and harmless; yet to pity and pray for them, and, as the Apostle directs, "*if they hunger to feed them, if they thirst to give them drink,*" is what we are in reason obliged to; being such offices of humanity as no particular disgusts or enmities should interrupt or prevent. In the mean while whoever considers the fatal ill effects of hatred, malice, and private revenge; how nations and families are disordered and ruined by these worst engines of the Devil; and how well it would be for the world, would men, as far as the good of society will admit, refer their cause to God, and leave it to Him to avenge their wrongs; must needs think so sublime a

precept

precept of morality; well worthy it's divine Author, the great Saviour and Lover of Mankind.

There are moreover to be found in the gospel, many excellent rules and admonitions, levelled by our Lord directly, and in a manner unknown to former moralists, at the heart of man; as being the only source of moral good or evil. Hence did He so frequently caution his Disciples against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, under the notion of leaven, which would unavoidably corrupt their best services; and render their fastings, their prayers, and their alms, of no avail in God's sight: When at the same time He gave them to understand, that the most private devotions of the closet, every the least instance of unseen beneficence, and that unaffected abstinence which disfigures not the face, are all observed by Him who *seeth in secret,*

secret, and will reward them openly. And, how ill soever such spiritual instructions were apprehended or relished by the dishonest part of his audience, certain it is that the operations of the human heart, that hidden fountain, are what alone can rectify each virtuous emanation, and give any real merit to actions in the sight of God, however plausible their appearance in the eye of the world.

Thus in every instance, whatever expositions of, or additions to, the moral law were made by Jesus, they will appear upon proper enquiry so agreeable to right reason, and the principles of natural light, that all unprejudiced and sober-minded persons cannot but approve of them. — Not that mere natural light without such a guide would ever have led men, in their confessedly degenerate state, to these discoveries with regard even to morals: On the contrary, the

longer they had been left to themselves, the greater need would they have been in of a Leader and Teacher from God. As is evident not only from the lamentable depravity of the bulk of mankind, but more especially from the corruption of the Jewish Doctors; who, at the time of Christ's coming, had rendered the commandments of God, and that too in some of the most essential points of morality, such as filial duty, charity, and beneficence, of no effect through their traditions.

It is true (what has been sometimes opposed to the necessity of any revelation) that human reason is by nature qualified for the attainment of pure natural religion, as a means for effecting it's proper end: Neither did Christ, we allow, teach any moral doctrine but what is perfectly agreeable to the light of reason: He himself directed men to this light, thereby to form

form their judgments in divine matters ;
“ *why even of yourselves* (said He to the Jews) *judge ye not what is right?*” But still there is a wide difference betwixt a capacity for comprehending truth, and the actual comprehension of it. The reasoning faculty may be obstructed through passion, may be injured through neglect, may move under a wrong influence ; at best is never found sufficient to any considerable degree of knowledge, without the process of education and learning. It is well known there are in every science certain axioms or avowed rules which, when fairly explained, a man necessarily assents to ; but such as he would never have discovered by the best efforts of his own strength. And what wonder if the powers of the mind, crazed and disordered by vice and error, should stand in need of an instructor to clear up and ascertain the limits even of moral fitnesses ?

Now such an instructor was Christ: Of whom it might well be said, "*Never Man spake like this Man.*"—The precepts of Moses were indeed sanctified under the seal of a divine commission; and many Prophets and inspired persons have given excellent rules for the direction and good government of human life; who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. There are too, it must be granted, many fine sentiments scattered up and down the writings of the Heathen Moralists, which right reason and true religion approve and justify. But it was Christ who explained, refined, and perfected the Law of Moses; he spiritualised the letter, making it quick and powerful, so as to affect the inward man, and reach even to the most secret recesses of the heart. The Prophets were but his messengers and forerunners: He was Lord to David, greater than Jonas, greater than Solomon; greater—not barely in person,
but

but in precept ; not in authority and majesty only, but likewise in instruction and example ; his life and actions, as well as his doctrine, being a continued lesson of morality. Lastly, his precepts were not, like those of the Philosophers, loose and undigested, surrounded with numberless errors, more than enough to render the truths they delivered of no general effect ; little able to persuade, less so to oblige ; but correct and entire, free from all inconsistent and contradictory notions, cogent in their own nature and tendency, and backed with the highest and most forcible sanctions. So true was what He himself said of his own doctrine — “ *The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.* — In short—it is Christ who hath given the world a system of morals so elevated and compleat, that corrupt nature could never have collected, would never have followed it ; yet withal so reasonable in

itself, and enforced by such motives, that nothing but obstinacy can prevent our seeing, nothing but vicious inclinations hinder us from pursuing it.

2. I should now proceed, secondly, to enquire into the other branch of Christ's preaching; which consists of a revelation of the means, by virtue of which, man, who in his fallen state cannot keep the moral law, may be reconciled to his offended God, and obtain eternal salvation.

But, as the prosecution of this head would unavoidably lead me to trespass on your time and patience, I shall conclude for the present with this general application of what has been said already, viz. that, as we all profess ourselves the followers of so heavenly a Teacher, we would approve ourselves such in good earnest by candidly attending to his holy laws, and conscientiously endeavouring
to

to observe them.—It must needs appear to every unbiaſſed mind that the precepts of the goſpel have a direct tendency to reform and purify our vitiated nature : And in this view they certainly deſerve our moſt ſerious attention. But if we add the exceeding dignity of the perſon who delivered them, that He was the Son of God, manifeſted to be ſo by many infallible proofs; and that He came into the world to ſave the world, by inſtructing mankind in their way to happineſs; in this regard they have an unqueſtionable claim to, and demand upon, our obedience. The times of ignorance God is ſaid to have winked at—*i. e.* to have looked with an eye of commiſeration, and not to have executed his wrath upon ſinful Heathens. They were in darkneſs, and the works of darkneſs they did: But “we are of the light,” and it is juſtly required of us, that we ſhould “walk as children of light.” If we ſtill conti-

nue in rioting and wantonness, in strife and envy, in malice and uncharitableness, what are we the better for the purity of Christ's doctrine? or with what pretence can we call ourselves his disciples? Our condition indeed in this case is so much worse than that of the Heathens, as we are no longer the same unhappy objects of God's compassion and mercy. We shall be beaten with many stripes, because knowing his will we did it not.—Let us then in this our day make good use of that gracious light, which is held out to us in the words of Him who "*spake as never Man spake*;" pursue it's guidance, work under it's influence, ere the night, the night of death, cometh, wherein no one can work. So shall we be meet to be partakers in another life, with the spirits of just men made perfect, of that eternal glory which shall then be revealed.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N X X X .

JOHN, vii. 46.

Never Man spake like this Man.

IN discoursing from these words on a former occasion, I proposed to make some candid enquiry into the nature of Christ's doctrine ; in order to shew the general fitness of it, upon the principles of human reason, to the common apprehension of every sober and unprejudiced person.

And to this end I divided the doctrine of Christ into two branches—the one
consisting

consisting of a republication of the moral law refined and perfected—the other of a revelation of the means whereby man, who in his fallen state cannot keep the law, may be reconciled to his offended God, and obtain eternal salvation.

The former of these, *i. e.* the moral and practical part of Christ's preaching, has been already considered.

2. I now proceed to enquire into the other branch, which consists of a revelation of the means whereby man, who in his fallen state cannot keep the law, may be reconciled to his offended God, and obtain eternal salvation.

And this too we shall find no ways irreconcilable with our reason, whether contemplating the nature of God, or that of Man; but in every respect highly credible, and worthy of all grateful acceptance.

That

That the Original of Being, the fountain of life and goodness, is of a gracious and merciful disposition, hath been always universally acknowledged, as a truth resulting from sensible experience, and the traces of divine Providence in the visible creation. How much soever men in times of ignorance puzzled their understandings about the cause of evil, they still attributed the good that appears in the world to it's proper author, the Supreme God. — With regard even to pardoning goodness, though unenlightened reason could never have dictated the terms upon which it would be dispensed ; yet, that God upon certain conditions should be inclined to pardon man, his only reasoning creature in this lower world, and therefore the only one capable of sinning against Him, was a prevailing opinion in all ages, and among all nations ; as is evident from the many differing methods made use of by different

ent people to appease his wrath and render Him propitious. From these too it appears that justice as well as mercy was ever an ingredient in the notion of the Deity. Their being conscious of having offended Him, in whom they lived, moved, and had their being, was what drove them to try every expedient in order to atone for their transgressions ; whilst their persuasion of the divine benevolence induced them to hope every expedient effectual.

Moreover, the frailty of man's state, which, whence soever derived, is certainly become natural ; insomuch that he cannot always stand upright, but is frequently betrayed, either by himself or others, into the commission of what he disapproves and condemns ; affords some grounds of reasonable expectation, that a wise and good Creator will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss, so
as

as to punish for every trespass ; but will accept of atonement for sins of infirmity.

Now the conditions which Christianity offers for the obtaining forgiveness of sins are these—*Repentance towards God—and Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.* The former of which, (viz.) Repentance, (including always a hearty sorrow for past trespasses, a sincere resolution never to commit the like for the future, and an earnest desire of pardon) is so fit and reasonable in itself, that a man justly expects it of his offending brother : And can we choose but think it due unto God, whom we are ungrateful enough to provoke, though the acknowledged author of our being, and of every comfort that flows from it ? It is surely the least to be done, and what the light of nature directs us to do, to revoke what we have done amiss, condemn ourselves in it, ask
 God

God forgiveness, and return to duty. Without such previous humiliation there can be no manner of pretension to that mercy which we necessarily believe to be in God.

After all, it is true that human reason could never have assured itself as to the extent of divine mercy; how far it might reach, to what degrees or number of sins, and no farther. This was reserved for his revelation who knew the whole will of his Father, and came down from Heaven on purpose to make it known unto us; who hath therefore commanded us to forgive a brother *not only seven times, but seventy times seven*; because even such forbearance carries with it no proportion to the forgiveness of God, whose perfections we are taught to imitate. And, since it is revealed that God's mercy is infinite, and that the worst of sinners, upon returning to obedience, become

come fitting objects of his pardoning goodness, there can surely be no objection to a truth so full of comfort to every soul.

Reason indeed, from considering this alone, might possibly be embarrassed in it's notions concerning divine justice. For, it must be granted, if nothing more was required in order to pardon of sins, than such a repentance as we have been describing, this would not be sufficient to secure us the favour of God: Mere sorrow for having transgressed a law being no reparation of transgression without a sincere endeavour after future obedience, grounded on faith in Christ.

Therefore—to compleat our reconciliation with God, we are commanded not only to repent, but also to have faith in Christ.—This faith it is which dignifies repentance, and renders it of great estimation

mation in the sight of God; who, upon entering into a new covenant with sinful man, is graciously pleased to impart the efficacy of his righteousness to every penitent believer.—Myfterious truth! yet revealed with fuch a power of evidence, as reason unprejudiced cannot refift. — precepts the moft pure, refined and heavenly; miracles the moft amazing, open and beneficent; on either fide fupport the doctrine of man's redemption. The moral part of the gofpel, prefcribing the whole duty of man in every relation he ftands in towards his God, his Neighbour, and Himfelf, affords good affurance from within of the holinefs and veracity of him who taught it. Whilft the manifeft completion of ancient prophecies in the perfon of Jefus, his cafting out devils, curing the moft inveterate difeafes, making the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the dumb to fpeak, the blind to fee, at a word's fpeaking, or a fingle touch;

touch; with many other instances of divine power—such as multiplying a little food to the satisfying of many thousands; raising the dead, particularly his own dead body to life again, wherewith He visibly ascended into Heaven, and from thence poured down the most amazing gifts upon his followers; by means of which his name was preached, his authority maintained, and his doctrine published throughout the world; give undeniable testimony from without to the divinity of his mission—that He was the very Christ, the Son of God, sent to redeem mankind from their sins by the sacrifice of Himself.

There are indeed, besides these conditions of Faith and Repentance which are absolutely necessary to our salvation through Christ, two positive rites, and two only, instituted by Himself as generally necessary thereto; which are Bap-

tism and the Supper of the Lord. The one ordained to be a sacrament of initiation into the Christian Church ; wherein the washing of the body with pure water is a very significant symbol of that inward purity required of all Christ's true Disciples, as well as a pledge of that grace and pardon which shall be conferred upon them.—The other designed for a perpetual commemoration of the sufferings and death of Christ ; and of the inestimable benefits which we receive from them.—So that both these sacred rites, though of positive institution, are yet so simple in themselves, and so easy to be complied with, as likewise of such apparent moral tendency, that they must be allowed altogether worthy of God the supreme lawgiver to enjoin ; and fit and reasonable, and of great moment it is that man should observe them.

And now—What can right reason
object

object to the great scheme and end of the Christian Covenant? whereby the justice of God is satisfied, his mercy illustrated, and mankind saved. — For though we are not able to comprehend the mysterious workings of God's Providence, and many things were proposed by Christ which are above our reason in the present state; yet as they are not contrary to it, and we may be convinced upon evidence irrefragable that the declaration of them is from God; we cannot, without virtually disclaiming reason, refuse our assent to, and belief of, such doctrines. It is a duty prescribed us even by the law of nature, to submit our narrow and limited understandings to the infinite wisdom of God; and to believe what He says, how much soever transcending our conceptions, because He, who can neither be deceived himself, nor deceive his creatures, hath said it. The dispensations of the Almighty are

unfathomable by the utmost reach of our faculties. This only we know, that He is every where present, directing all things according to the counsels of his own unerring mind. And, as in the book of nature, every single character is enough to puzzle and confound our reason, though the general lines of Providence are legible throughout : So in the book of scripture, there are heavenly and spiritual truths which surpass our comprehension ; but that the whole is the word of God, is a truth level with the capacity of every honest enquirer : And that surely is sufficient to determine our belief of every part, with whatever difficulties attended.

Thus—the promises which Christianity offers to all who sincerely embrace it, (wherein too consists the excellency of the gospel covenant,) are of such things as no carnal eye either hath seen, or can see ;

see; neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the rewards, which God hath prepared in another life for those who obey Him in this. Yet are they clearly enough to be discerned by the eye of faith; and have their proper influence upon the conduct of every sincere Christian, because depending on the veracity of Him who cannot lie.

Again—Christ hath promised in his gospel the gracious assistances of the divine Spirit, to enlighten, comfort and support upright minds, as well in their enquiries into the truth of his Religion, as in their practice of the duties required by it. Now, the motions of this Blessed Spirit are like those of the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, and we cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: His operations are so undistinguishable from the free workings of our own faculties, that it can in no case be

pronounced, whether or how far we were influenced by them. But if we have all possible evidence for believing, that there was an extraordinary effusion of the Spirit upon the Apostles and first Christians, answerable to our Lord's prediction, and to the necessity of that time; upon what pretence can we reject the promise of Christ, that we too should be favoured with all necessary succours from the same Spirit? Why should his words be presumed to fail in this instance, if they failed not in the other? And, as to the doctrine itself, when fairly interpreted, so as not to break in upon our natural freedom as reasonable and moral agents, and therefore accountable every one for his own actions; there is surely nothing in it but what is perfectly agreeable to sober reason, and to the justest notions we can form both of man's present weakness, and of God's wisdom and goodness.

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In a word—Such is the excellency of the Christian Religion, and such the evidence of the authority on which it is founded; that nothing but candour and attention is requisite, in order to men's embracing the great truths revealed in it; nothing but integrity and resolution, in order to their observing the holy duties prescribed by it. It is equally unreasonable to reject the word of God, because above the comprehension of our mental faculties, and because contradictory to our carnal appetites. We find even the malicious Jews, who were present at the preaching of Jesus, could not forbear crying out, "*Never Man spake like this Man.*" The matter of his doctrine was so rational and important; and the delivery of it attended and illustrated by such amazing power, as manifestly shewed him to be a Teacher more than human. And though we neither heard him speak, nor saw his miracles;

yet having the substance both of what He said and what He did, set before us in a clear and impartial light, by those very persons who were witnesses to both; we cannot possibly want evidence for conviction, if there be first but an honest and willing mind. And that certainly the glad tidings of such a revelation most justly demand. For let it be considered farther, that the gospel is offered to us not only as the most perfect revelation of the divine will that was ever hitherto made to mankind; but as the last too that ever shall be made. And therefore the use we make of it is a point of the utmost consequence. Nothing less than the favour or the wrath of Almighty God, the peace or perturbation of our consciences, the eternal happiness or misery of our souls, depends upon this point. If *we neglect so great salvation, i. e.* such gracious means of obtaining it, nothing remains but a certain *fearful looking*
- *for*

for of judgment : But if we sincerely believe in Christ the Son of God, the Redeemer of the World, and seriously endeavour to live according to his precepts; we are then heirs of the promises, and have a right by covenant to the pardon of our sins, and a state of immortality and bliss—through the alone merits and mediation of Him, who not only spake as never man spake, but also suffered for us what never man suffered.

S E R M O N XXXI.

MATTHEW, vii. 7.

Ask, and it shall be given You.

MAN, in every point of view, whether with regard to soul or body, is a creature so absolutely dependant ; that to offer up prayers to the almighty author and preserver of his being, is evidently a natural duty : To which even the most profligate of men give an undesigned testimony, being from the mere impulse of nature driven to the practice of it when in the article of surprize and danger. I shall therefore

fore say nothing at present of the obligation we are under to so natural, so rational, and so necessary a part of Religion.

But though such be the propensity of our nature to pray; yet to perform this duty, so as to please God and benefit ourselves, may deserve a special consideration; seeing mankind in general have erred as much with respect to the manner and matter of their prayers, as to the object unto which they have addressed them. Well then did the Disciples of the Blessed Jesus petition their divine Master, saying, *Lord teach us to pray* — And that excellent and comprehensive model which He gave them at that time, together with some particular directions occasionally delivered by Him on the same subject, very justly demand our most serious attention and gratitude. For surely, whether we reflect on the ignorance, prejudice, or passion of the
human

human mind ; so apt to cheat us in our conceits of happiness, and to misguide us in our pursuits after it ; we must needs acknowledge the instructing mankind in a point of such infinite concern as that of presenting acceptable supplications to the Giver of all good things, to be one of the great blessings of the gospel dispensation. More especially when we consider the infallible assurance annexed, that whatsoever we ask properly, we shall receive effectually. For under this limitation of asking properly is the promise in the text, *Ask, and it shall be given you*, always to be understood : There being never any merit in barely asking ; oftentimes much demerit, when the affections of the Soul, which are naked and open to the all-seeing eye of God, are not duly regulated and prepared for so solemn an intercourse with Heaven.

It shall therefore be the business of
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the ensuing discourse, to lay before you, and recommend to your observance, certain general requisites toward the rendering our prayers available at the Throne of Grace.

1. And here—What first occurs is the object of this religious worship. Upon which article indeed, though very material in itself, one might think it needless to offer any thing before a Christian Congregation ; did not the practice of a deluded Church make it necessary to teach and maintain, that we are to address all our requests to God alone, (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three Persons but one God) in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man. This the gospel every where prescribes ; this was manifestly both the doctrine and usage of the primitive Church, and is therefore the glory of the reformed ; in opposition to any invocations

vocations of Angels or Saints departed : Which are at best not only idle and vain, but unlawful and impious ; derogatory from the honour of God, and the merits of his Christ ; who as our only Redeemer is in consequence our sole Intercessor. Without enlarging then on a point so clear, and of which I trust we are all fully persuaded, I proceed to consider the qualifications required on our parts, when we put up our prayers to God, through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, both God and Man.

2. Now the ground-work of devotion is faith ; faith in God, that He is every where present to hear, and all-powerful to answer, the requests of his servants who call upon Him. Without this, as the Apostle speaks, it is impossible for us to please Him, or consequently to profit ourselves : *For he that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and that He*
is

is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. — Indeed one of the great ends of prayer is to prove and exercise this virtue in us. We cannot surely think to inform God, who knoweth all our necessities before we ask; nor to prevail on Him as on a fond and partial Being: But it is for our sakes that He has enjoined this reasonable, this improving service. The more frequently we pray, thereby acknowledging our constant dependance on the supreme Governor of the Universe, the stronger shall we grow in faith, and the better satisfied shall we be under all the dispensations of his Providence. Upon which account we may presume it is, that our best petitions are not always immediately granted; viz. that by perseverance, and adding to our faith, patience, we may become fitter objects of the divine favour. The parables in the gospel of the importunate Friend, and of the unjust Judge,

Judge, were expressly delivered in order to teach us, that men ought *always to pray, and not to faint*. And the instance of the Canaanitish Woman, who would not desist from her entreaties, till, by dint of an uncommon faith and assiduity, she had as it were wrested a miracle from the hands of our Lord, is demonstrative in this case. Add, moreover, that faith is frequently insisted on by Christ and his Apostles, as a necessary ingredient to effectual prayer.

It is not indeed to be conceived that any should pray without some degree of faith, without believing at least that God is, and that He can hear the prayers of men: At the same time it is much to be suspected that the invisibility of the divine nature, together with the seemingly undistinguishing distribution of temporal favours, do in great measure strike a damp upon devotion; and occasion that
coldness

coldness and inattention; so observable in the publick places of worship. But although we are not to expect miracles under the established light of the gospel, and though the ordinary methods of God's dealings with mankind be confessedly reserved and mysterious to carnal apprehension; yet if we believe any thing as Christians, we must be satisfied that Christ is at all times as really and powerfully present with his Church, as even then when he healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people; when he opened the eyes of the blind, and made both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. And if faith was necessarily required in those supplicants (as we find it was) in order to qualify them for such blessings from him on Earth, no doubt the prayers of the faithful continue to be a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling favour, acceptable to him in Heaven; and, whatever may be

the event of things here, will in no wise lose it's reward.

Let not however any deceive themselves by entertaining a wrong notion of this faith; which must be properly understood as including a good habitual disposition to moral obedience. For otherwise a mere lifeless faith will little avail us in our prayers; since *the Devils themselves believe and tremble*, and would possibly pray too, could they obtain their ends by so doing.

3. Another requisite therefore to the rendering our prayers accepted with God, is a penitent heart—I say a penitent heart, because this is all that any man can pretend to, there being no one who liveth and sinneth not: And because too repentance through Christ is regarded in the stead of innocence at the Court of Heaven; where there is joy over every sinner that repenteth.

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There cannot be a greater mockery of the divine majesty, nor any thing more offensive to his holiness, than for a man to draw near Him with his lips, and to have his heart far from Him. This is absurdly as well as impiously to play the hypocrite with that omniscient Being, *who knoweth the hearts of all the children of men.*—We are, it is true, taught and encouraged, in confidence of our all-powerful Intercessor, to ask daily forgiveness, together with grace to amend our lives. But in a formal manner to supplicate the Almighty, that He would be pleased to pardon our past crimes, though at the same time we are set upon it, whenever our worldly interests, or our pleasures invite, to repeat them; is to turn our very prayers into sin, and to call down vengeance upon our own heads. Hence the pious resolution of the Psalmist—*I will wash my hands in innocency, O Lord! and so will I compass*

thine altar. For, as he elsewhere observes,—*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.* And the reasoning of the poor man in the gospel, in favour of the Blessed Jesus who had opened his eyes, was certainly well worthy the attention even of a Jewish Sanhedrim; *Now we know, says he, that God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him He heareth.*—Indeed the truth is so obvious both from reason and scripture, that *the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*, that it needs not any longer to be insisted on: Especially since the wicked themselves (to their shame be it spoken) betray an unhappy conviction in the point; either by totally neglecting this sacred ordinance, unless, as was before observed, in the article of distress; or by an unseemly performance of it.—*But the prayer of the upright, saith the wise man, is the Lord's delight.* He both
heareth

heareth graciously, and will answer in due season, the pious supplications of his people, who apply to him in faith, with a truly penitent heart, and (which is the last requisite I shall mention) with a charitable disposition toward their fellow creatures.

4. For that this too is an indispensable condition of our acceptance with the God of mercy, sufficiently appears, both from the article itself in our Lord's summary of asking forgiveness, *as we forgive others*; and moreover from the particular stress which he seems to have laid upon it, by enlarging on this single article; For (said He immediately after having delivered the whole prayer) *if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* Where we see that in the most important petition

tion we can put up to Heaven, we shall not be heard unless we are at the same time in charity with our neighbours. And, if we cannot prevail for that earnest of all future favour, the pardon of our sins, what other blessing shall we presume to expect at the hand of God? Nor will any person think this a hard saying, who considers that the greatest debt which a fellow servant can owe to one of us is but as *an hundred pence*; whilst the least which the very poorest amongst us owes to our heavenly Master is as *ten thousand talents*. A consideration more than sufficient to vindicate the Christian doctrine (unreasonably objected to by some) not barely of forgiving injuries, but even of loving our enemies; *i. e.* as our Saviour himself hath best explained this duty, of blessing them, doing them good, and praying for them. For what less can we do in return, seeing our Lord not only freely dischargeth

us

us from that great debt, because we desire Him; but by the very act of such discharge gives us also a title to an everlasting inheritance? And if it be the perfection of a Christian to imitate the Supreme Being in whatever He is imitable by us, how glorious the imitation of Him in that adorable instance of universal benevolence!

It is then to be regarded as an excellent advantage of prayer, and should be one great motive to the regular performance of it, that as it ought to be offered up at least every day, so does it necessarily lead us, at least every day, to purify our hearts from hatred and revenge, and all uncharitableness. — Whilst we duly maintain this spiritual commerce with Heaven, it will be impossible for us to let the sun go down upon our wrath: Our devotion and charity will go hand in hand, and give a mutual grace and

efficacy to each other. Happy for ourselves ! happy for the world ! were but this qualifying circumstance of a charitable disposition, in order to pray with success, religiously attended to and observed. How would the worst engines of our spiritual Adversary be rendered ineffectual ; and the ancient prophecies of peace under the kingdom of the Messias be in a manner literally accomplished ! How would the ears of the Lord be open to the prayers of the children of men, and his blessing be upon his people !

Thus much for the qualifications more immediately respecting the frame and temper of our spirits, whenever we put up our prayers to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ : Which are a lively faith in the divine attributes of knowledge, power, and goodness ; an humble confession of, and sorrow for, our past sins, with resolution of amendment

ment of life; and good-will towards all mankind.

There remains yet one thing to be considered, of great moment in regard to asking effectually; and that is the substance of our petitions themselves. With some observations on which I shall close this discourse.

5. That each one is inclined to pray for what he conceives would be for his good, will admit of no doubt. But then, in a world so full of vanity, where riches and honours and power are so generally esteemed as necessary ingredients to human happiness, and pursued accordingly; it is much to be feared that some breathings of the soul after such acquisitions do too commonly intrude upon and corrupt our devotion. For though they may not proceed so far as to utter in express words what they secretly and earnestly

earnestly desire of this sort ; yet accordingly as we are inwardly affected will our oblations of every kind be accepted or refused by Him who trieth the reins and searcheth the heart. An humble, thankful, and contented spirit, wholly resigned to the will of God, who knows what is good for us better than we do ourselves, is of great estimation in his sight. But covetousness, or too great solicitude after, and confidence in, mere worldly advantages, is described by the Apostle to be a species of Idolatry : Than which nothing can alienate us more from the favour of God. How much better are we instructed in this point both from the example and precepts of our divine Master ? who in all things submitted himself to the will of his heavenly Father, though poor, destitute, afflicted : And whose discourses were in a special manner directed to suppress every covetous imagination in the minds of his followers.

lowers. It is too an observation particularly applicable to our present subject, that in that most excellent form of prayer, which He was pleased to dictate to the world as an exemplar of all prayer, there is only one petition for the necessities of this present life: And that too comprized in terms of the utmost modesty and humility—*Give us this day our daily bread.* The rest are all of a spiritual nature; either respecting the glory of God, or the forgiveness of our sins, with deliverance from temptation, and the power of the evil one.

It is then an inviolable rule, that what we ask be agreeable to the holy will of God; otherwise it is vain to expect that we shall in any sense be the better for our prayers. And to the neglect of this rule is perhaps in great measure owing that disregard for religion which we every where meet with. Some are uneasy and dissatisfied

dissatisfied that their requests are not granted ; they find themselves neither the richer nor the happier for their devotions. Whilst others for the same reason think it better trusting to their own sagacity for the good things they lust after, than to the wisdom of Providence ; which appears to them to have no respect to persons, whether they be just or unjust, in the distribution of such favours ; or haply, as they may conjecture, hath no hand at all in the distribution of them. Whereas the truth of the case is, what St. James long since declared—"Men ask and receive not, because they ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts." Whilst, like servile flatterers, they have nothing but their own worldly advancement in view, when they pay their court to the divine Presence, no wonder if they are disappointed. Such persons indeed can have none of that real satisfaction, that heart-felt joy, which

which honest and good men experience in this their solemn intercourse with Heaven ; and which therefore renders it the most comfortable employment of their lives. For the design and effect too of well ordered prayer, is to keep alive within us a just sense of our dependance on the Supreme Being ; to procure us a constant communication with the Holy Spirit ; and to endue us with that heavenly peace of mind which *passeth all understanding*. — And whoever is truly possessed of these blessings, one may venture to pronounce, is more substantially happy, than any the best gifts that this world can bestow, could possibly make him. Nor need such a one be under any anxiety about temporal necessities ; seeing that He who cannot lie hath promised, that if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ; if we make it our chief care, by learning and practising the will of God, to secure to our-

selves

selves an interest in Heaven, all these things shall be added unto us; *i. e.* we shall not only be blest with the certain expectation of future and eternal happiness; but shall likewise be provided with whatever is requisite to the support of our present being, from Him who knoweth that we have need of such things.

In a word then—Give me leave to commend and exhort, that we make a sober and sanctifying use of the inestimable privilege we enjoy of conversing with God in prayer: By constantly performing this duty in the name, and through the alone mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ; with a becoming confidence and perseverance; at the same time with a thorough sense of our own unworthiness; together with a compassionate regard to the failings of others. — And, because through the weakness of our mortal

mortal nature we know not of ourselves what to pray for as we ought, let us never cease to implore the assistance of the Holy Ghost; that He would be pleased to purify our hearts, and direct us in all our addresses to Heaven; who himself also *maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and praise henceforth and for ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S.